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MRS. APHRA BEHN:
THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL WOMAN PLAYWRIGHT

BY

JULIA N. OATES

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FORM 412 5M 6-41

MRS. APHRA BEHN: THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL WOMAN PLAYWRIGHT

by

Julia N. Oates

Date: November 10, 1944

Approved: Chas. E. Ward, Chairman

W. H. Irving

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in
the Graduate School of
Arts and Sciences
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Charles E. Ward for his helpful guidance during the writing of this thesis and to express my deep appreciation for his consideration.

J. N. O.

November 7, 1944

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MRS. APHRA BEHN: THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL WOMAN PLAYWRIGHT

Chapter I

THE LIFE AND CAREER OF MRS. BEHN

It seems almost incredible that today so few facts are known concerning the life of a person who was as prominent as Mrs. Aphra Behn evidently was during the latter decades of the seventeenth century. To many she may appear an "unknown." Even to many who are familiar with other writers of the Restoration, her name is not eminent. Yet there must have been a place in the literary world of the period for a woman writing for her living, writing during her lifetime some nineteen plays, twelve or thirteen "novels," several letter collections, and innumerable poems. It would seem that something of the glory that was hers should be given back to Mrs. Behn.

But where are we to turn for the facts of her life? Little authentic information is available. Even the correct spelling of her name is not certain. It is commonly written Aphra, but instead was it really Ayfara, Aphara, Aphora, Afra, Apharra, Afara, or Aphaw, or even Fyhare? Was she born Johnson or Amis, sometimes Amies? Where was she born and on what exact date? Did she actually spend part of her childhood or youth in

Surinam? Did she marry a merchant with a Dutch name; if so when and where; or did she merely assume the name? Was part of her life spent at the court of Charles II? Why was she sent to Antwerp as a spy? Who paid her debts so that she was released from prison after her return to England? How did she live between that time and the beginning of her literary career? During the years when she was writing, where did she live and what kind of life did she lead, among what friends? Innumerable questions about her arise. If these and others could be answered, each would contribute its bit to the complete picture of the life of the "incomparable Astrea," the "bonny Mrs. Behn."

Previous to the appearance of an article by Edmund Gosse in the Athanaeum of September 6, 1884, the biographers[1] of Mrs. Behn followed the same pattern, a pattern which seems to have originated in The History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn, Written by One of the Fair Sex, published in the first volume of All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn edited by Mr. Charles Gildon in 1735. The author of this "life" professes an "intimate acquaintance" with the "admirable Astrea" and making use of her "lucky Occasion" proceeds:

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[1]Theophilus Cibber, The Lives of the Poets, III, pp.17-32. Andrew Kippis, ed. (2nd ed.) Biographia Britannica, II, pp.141-146. David Ernest Baker etc., eds., Biographia Dramatica, I, pp.28-30. Biographie Universelle, IV, pp.62-63. Rev. J. L. Blake, ed., A General Biographical Dictionary, p.109.

> She was a gentlewoman by Birth, of a good Family in the City of Canterbury in Kent, her Father's Name was Johnson, whose Relation to the Lord Willoughby, drew him, for the advantageous Post of Lieutenant-General of many Isles, besides the Continent of Surinam, from his quiet retreat at Canterbury, to run a hazardous Voyage to the West Indies. With him he took his chief Riches, his Wife and children; and in that number Afra, his promising Darling, our future Heroine, and admired Astrea ----

Mrs. Behn is further described in flowery language as a precocious child. Then follows the account of the death of the father at sea; of the stay in Surinam, where she became acquainted with and learned the history of Oroonoko and Imoinda, whose adventures, at the request of Charles II, she later related in her novel, Oroonoko, the Royal Slave; of Aphra's marriage to the merchant Behn, a Londoner, but of "Dutch extraction"; of her stay at Antwerp, where she learned of Prince Tarquin; and of the fantastical affair with her lover, Vander Albert.[1] With various additions and subtractions the stories are fundamentally the same.

Mr. Gosse's article, however, presents a point for dispute, for he contributes a valuable bit of information:

> There came into my possession a few months ago, a folio volume containing the MS poems of the celebrated Anne, Countess of Winchilsea, copied about 1695 and with innumerable notes and corrections in her autograph.

Among these notes he makes the find:

> In a poem in my collection which has never been printed, called "The Circuit of Apollo,"[2] Lady Winchilsea says: ----

---

[1] All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn, published by Mr. Charles Gildon, I, pp.1-73.

[2] Now in print: Myra Reynolds, ed., The Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea, p.92.

> And standing where sadly he might now descry
> From the banks of the Stowre to the desolate Wye,
> He lamented for Behn, o'er that place of her birth,
> And said amongst Women was not on the earth,
> Her superior in fancy, in language, or witt,
> Yett own'd that a little too loosely she writ!

To the second of these lines Lady Winchilsea has appended this note: ----

> Mrs. Behn was daughter to a Barber, who lived formerly in Wye, a little market town (now much decay'd) in Kent. Though the account of her life before her work pretends otherwise; some Persons now alive do testify upon their knowledge that to be her original.

Upon the strength of that note Mr. Gosse wrote to the Rev. J. H. Dixon, then Vicar of Wye, who replied that he did have a register of two hundred years before and had found in it a record that "on July 10th, 1640, were baptised, at Wye, Ayfara the daughter and Peter the son of John and Amy Johnson."[1]

Following the publication of this information the biographers accepted the facts that Mrs. Behn was the daughter of a barber named John Johnson, that she was baptised at Wye in Kent July 10, 1640, and that there are three items in the outline of her career:

> (1) With a relation whom in Oroonoko she calls her father and who was appointed lieutenant-governor of Surinam, she went to that colony, where she met the royal slave, who is the hero of her story, and where she remained until about 1658. (2) She married a London merchant of Dutch extraction, named Behn, but was widowed by 1666. (3) In the latter part of 1666, while acting as a political agent at Antwerp, she gained through a Dutch lover of hers, named Vander Albert, early information of the famous raid by De Ruyter on

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[1] "Mrs. Behn," Athanaeum, (2-1884), p.304.

> the English ships in the Thames and Midway; but her timely warning was ridiculed by the British government officials, and she retired to devote herself to literature.[1]

Mr. Ernest Bernbaum says that those biographers and scholars[2] who followed this general outline secured their information from two of Mrs. Behn's novels, Oroonoko and The Fair Jilt, and from The Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn Written by One of the Fair Sex; and for that reason he would find it unreliable. In 1913 he published two articles to support his thesis. In the first article entitled "Mrs. Behn's Oroonoko" he attempts to prove that the biographical information in the novel, Oroonoko, is untrustworthy because Mrs. Behn "deliberately and circumstantially lied." No relation of hers, he continues, was appointed lieutenant-governor of Surinam; her description of the colony was stolen from George Warren's Impartial Description of Surinam; and the events in which she participated were entirely imaginary.[3] The purpose of the second article is to prove that the three items of Mrs. Behn's career which are listed above cannot be considered material for a biography because the data found in the novel, The Fair Jilt, and in The Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn Written by One of the Fair Sex are more fiction that fact. Bernbaum

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[1] Ernest Bernbaum, "Mrs. Behn's Biography a Fiction," PMLA, 28 (1913), pp.432-433.

[2] Lives referred to are contained in the following volumes: The Dictionary of National Biography, II, pp.129-130; Cambridge History of English Literature, VIII, pp.159-161; E. A. Baker's "Introduction" to The Novels of Mrs. Aphra Behn; Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., III, p.657; 14th ed., III, p.331.

[3] George Lyman Kittredge Anniversary Papers, pp.419-433.

declares The Fair Jilt an imagined story because her hero, "Prince Tarquin, of the race of the last Kings of Rome," who Mrs. Behn says is a real person, is not accounted for in history at all. He continues:

> It is in the midst of this fanciful story that we come upon its only autobiographical remark -- that Mrs. Behn was sent to Antwerp by King Charles in 1665 or 1666. Of course we may not deny offhand the truth of that assertion; but in view of Mrs. Behn's frequent falsehood in Oroonoko, we cannot accept it on her uncorroborated word. Does there exist any reliable evidence to support it?[1]

Indeed there seems little such evidence, for if the fiction which is declared to be fact, is really the product of her imagination, the fact may as readily be declared fiction. "Since Mrs. Behn's autobiographer's remarks are untrustworthy, the problem of her true biography reduces itself to the question whether the Life and Memoirs is authentic."[2]

In proving the unreliability of the Life and Memoirs, Bernbaum argues that:

(1) The author who knew Mrs. Behn "intimately well" offers no new biographical information.

(2) The author repeats almost verbally the story told in Oroonoko and then makes the error of saying that "Aphara" (Mr. Bernbaum's spelling) could not have been in love with the slave Oroonoko because she was hardly more than a child; whereas the historical allusions in Oroonoko are to the years 1665-1666 when Aphara was between 25 and 26.

(3) The details of the Antwerp incident will not bear thorough scrutiny, particularly the part concerning the date of her arrival home and the story of the crossing.

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[1] "Mrs. Behn's Biography a Fiction," op. cit., p.434.

[2] Ibid., p.436.

(4) Chronologically Mrs. Behn could not have warned her government of the Dutch project to destroy the English fleet in the Thames and Midway, for she had returned home on a previous date. (As I show below there is no account of her either having any such information or sending it to England.)

(5) The author of The Life and Memoirs, whom Bernbaum supposes to be Charles Gildon, is unreliable because he had previously published, under the name of other authors, works which were proved his own; namely, The History of the Athenian Society (1691), The Post Boy Robbed of his Mail, and various poems in his Miscellany Poems and Chorus Poctarum.[1]

Having presented the arguments, he logically concludes:

> Indeed, what we can at present be said to know concerning Mrs. Behn's career is very little. The names of her parents, their humble station, the date and place of her baptism -- these are all the data we have of the first twenty-six years of her life. We do not even surely know that she was married to a Mr. Behn. The only episode of which considerable details are preserved is that which I have outlined above -- her six months' secret service in Antwerp in 1666, followed by her imprisonment for debt in 1668. In 1671 she began to write for the stage; but even thereafter such meagre contemporary notices as we find of her are critical rather than biographical. The proportionally large amount by which we must reduce our supposed knowledge may perhaps be best summed up in saying that everything except the opening sentences in the long first paragraph of her life in the Dictionary of National Biography should be struck out as unauthentic.[2]

Other alterations, too, have had to be made in the story of Mrs. Behn's life. Montague Summers would change the name from "Ayfara" Johnson to "Aphara" Amis, and justly, for he says in a note in the Memoirs of Mrs. Behn:

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1 "Mrs. Behn's Biography a Fiction," op. cit., pp.432-451.

2 Ibid., pp.451-452.

> The Vicar of Wye, the Rev. Edgar Lambert, in answer to my inquiries courteously writes: In company with Mr. C. S. Orwin, whose book, The History of the Wye Church and College, has just been published, I have closely examined the register and find no mention of 'Johnson' nor the fact that Aphara Amis' father was a barber.[1]

while V. Sackville-West corroborates the statement:

> An examination of the parish register of Wye reveals the truth: that there is no mention either of Johnson or his having been a barber, but that on the 10th of July, 1640, Peter and Ayfara, the son and daughter of John and Amy Amis, were baptised together at the church of SS Gregory and Martin. The entry is not difficult to decipher and reads:
>
> Peter ye son
> of John and Amy Amis. July ye 10th.
> Ayfara ye daughter[2]

We can, I believe, conclude that Aphra's father was named Amis, not Johnson. Nowhere, except in the Countess of Winchilsea's note, is he ever referred to as a barber.

For what it may be worth I shall quote here a passage which V. Sackville-West has used to support her conclusion that the Amis family returned to England earlier than 1664. It is taken from James Rodway's Chronological History of the Discovery and Settlement of Guiana 1493-1668, (Georgetown, Demerara, 1888):

> Lord Willoughby, having been released from the Tower with permission to proceed to Surinam, deputed a relation of his named Johnson as governor of that colony and also to look after his lord's interest in

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[1] Summers, Works, I, note 2, p.XVII.

[2] V. Sackville-West, Aphra Behn, the Incomparable Astrea, pp.13-14.

> the West Indies. Taking with him his wife and children, and also an adopted daughter named Afra or Aphra Johnson,[1] he sailed for Surinam toward the end of this (here in the margin is written 1658) or the beginning of the following year. He did not, however, live to reach his government, but fell sick and died on the voyage. His widow and the children proceeded to Surinam, where they remained for two or three years, living on one of Lord Willoughby's plantations (but St. John's Hill belonged to Sir Robert Harley, not to Lord Willoughby), which was under the management of Mr. Trefry, who acted as estate attorney for the lord proprietor.[2]

And there again appears the vague possibility that Aphra did write truth into her fiction, and there again appears more confusion in the unsolved puzzle. Facts, disputable, contradictory, unreliable, present themselves without relationship or order, and the questions remain unanswered.

However vague, confusing, and ill-founded the facts of Mrs. Behn's early life may be, the Calendar of State Papers of Charles II, 1666-1667 proves conclusively that she was appointed agent to Antwerp and reveals, at least partially, some of her problems and activities from August through December of 1666. In accord with Mr. Bernbaum, there is, however, in these papers no evidence to establish the fact that Mrs. Behn made reports concerning a proposed raid by De Ruyter and the Dutch Navy upon the English in the Thames and Midway.

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[1]This is the only mention made in the biographical accounts of the possibility that Aphra Amis was adopted by a man named Johnson and, therefore, did make the trip to Surinam. Such an explanation seems, I believe, logical and acceptable.

[2]Sackville-West, op. cit., p.89. It is not certain whether Rodway cites any authority for his statements, which obviously cannot be accepted as evidence, without unimpeachable corroboration.

In the first letter from Antwerp written August 16, 1666, and addressed to Mr. Halsall, cupbearer to the King, Mrs. Behn explains that she has already had an interview with William Scott,[1] to whom she refers in her correspondence as Caledon, and has found him, though at first shy, extremely willing to undertake the service. She must, against the advice of Sir Antony Des Marces, with whom she sailed, follow the army of exiled English into Holland because Bampfield, the colonel, watches Scott with such suspicious care that Scott fears he will be unable to carry out his duties effectually unless he can find "some office less troublesome." She has discovered that a certain man in Ludgate is a Dutch spy sent to watch and report on English merchant ships. Having spent the forty pounds she brought with her, she requests money and encloses a cypher which she thinks easier than the one she had originally planned to use.[2]

"Astrea," as Mrs. Behn signed herself in her political correspondence, was not able to establish connections with Scott again before August 30 or 31, for her letter of August 27, to Mr. Halsall, states that although she is assisted by a Mr. Nipho and Sir Antony Des Marces, she dares not for her life go into Holland. She reports the burning of ships and the return of troops from Germany and expresses her desire to set up a correspondence with the rogue (probably the one mentioned in the letter

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[1] H. G. Platt, Jr., in an article entitled "Astrea and Caledon, an Untouched Portrait of Aphra Behn," PMLA, 49 (1934), pp.544-559, attempts, on not too convincing evidence, to establish the thesis that Mrs. Behn was the mistress of Scott, with whom she was closely associated in Surinam. I find the material irrelevant.

[2] Calendar of State Papers, 1666-1667, p.44.

of August 16). She complains of the expensiveness of the place and begs for money, as she has had to pawn a ring to pay messengers.[1]

August 31 is the date of two letters, one to Major Halsall reporting that Scott has been seen again and expresses his willingness to serve and "wants not wit nor address, but only money." Not having been paid for his services in the army, he has run into debt in Amsterdam and cannot leave for the places where he will be best able to serve. Aphra begs that he be encouraged and his pardon assured. She again mentions the rogue whom she calls Sand Temple and declares that he should be kept in prison lest he return to Holland and ruin all.[2] The second letter, to Thomas Killigrew, groom of the bedchamber, explains that Halsall sends her no answers and that she is in great need of money to meet her own and Scott's expenses. She has twice given Scott ten pounds; she has spent her own forty pounds and has to spend ten guilders a day for living; she already owes twenty-five or thirty pounds and needs at least fifty pounds to pay her debts and go to Holland. She requests that Scott's pardon be sent along with some assurance of what he might expect, for his life is being threatened by one Corney, who would expose the rendezvous of Scott and Mrs. Behn to Bampfield.[3]

On September 4 still another letter tells of desperate

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[1] Calendar of State Papers, 1666-1667, p.72.

[2] Ibid., p.82.

[3] Ibid., pp.82-83.

straits and the impossibility of continuing her work or Scott's without one hundred pounds. She asks for copies of the letters of Sand Temple to Bampfield and begs that the money may be sent to a Mr. Piers, in whom she can confide.[1]

With her own letters Mrs. Behn continues sending reports of a political nature from Scott. In a letter of September 14 to Halsall she sends only a report of Naval news and mention of a Benjamin Turley, an agent in whom "the fanatics confide."[2] She is evidently continuing her efficient work without monetary compensation and is therein showing her loyalty.

Her need of money, however, is still urgent, for only three days later there follows a letter to Killigrew begging him again for means with which to satisfy Scott, who believes himself neglected, and to enable her to move to a place where she can meet Scott and carry on the business at hand.[3] Although at first the letters were merely pleading, they have now become desperately urging, still to no avail. By September 21 there has been some sort of answer from England, for Mrs. Behn writes then that Scott is overjoyed with the promise of his pardon, but cannot serve fully until it is received, for he is still threatened by the "unsufferable, scandalous, lying,prating fellow," Corney, who is still spreading the news of visits between her and Scott. Begging, as usual, for letters and money, she confesses that she

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[1] Calendar of State Papers, 1666-1667, p.97.

[2] Ibid., p.118.

[3] Ibid., p.135.

is almost out of her wits and fears the loss of Scott's help.[1]

Despite the lack of aid or encouragement from home, she continues to send news and reports, for her letter to Halsall and Scott's to her on September 25 contain information concerning the illness of De Ruyter.[2] Apparently, Mrs. Behn has decided that it is needless to ask either Halsall or Killigrew for money, for there is no record of another letter until November 3; it is addressed to Lord Arlington, the Secretary of State. She explains that she is there on his Lordship's business and, as no other person could, has drawn Scott to the service; but she will be unable to continue without the encouragement and supplies for which she has constantly written, but with no response. Confessing her conditions of debt, poverty, and the danger of imprisonment, she entreats him to help a "poor stranger whose life or death is in his hands."[3]

As unbelievable as it may seem, there is no more response to this letter than there has been to any of the preceding ones. Reduced then to the most abject conditions, discouraged, perhaps hungry and almost in rags, the day after Christmas, December 26, she again writes Lord Arlington still more pathetically. The realization of the justness of her cause gives her the courage to plead for mercy and beg for the one hundred pounds necessary to pay her debts, divide with Scott, and buy her passage home,

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[1] Calendar of State Papers, 1666-1667, p.145.

[2] Ibid., p.156.

[3] Ibid., p.236.

for now her only desire is to return to England. If the money does not come in time for the next convoy, she will have to stay another two months.[1] Again ignored and by now aware that she can expect no help from her government for which she has spent her own last forty pounds, she negotiates in England, from a certain Edward Butler, a private loan of some 150 pounds, which enables her to free herself of obligations and return home in January of 1667.[2]

Her return to England does not end Mrs. Behn's financial worries, for in 1668 we find her presenting Charles II with three petitions for the 150 pounds. The first is "for an order to Mr. May or Mr. Chiffinch for payment of the money due to Mr. Butler, she being threatened with an execution"; the second, "to order 150 pounds to be paid to Edward Butler, who threatens to use all severity with her if it is not paid within a week. Mr. Halsall and Mr. Killigrew know how justly it is due"; then follows a letter to Mr. Killigrew in which Aphra writes that she is ill and will go to prison if the money is not paid that night; the third petition follows: "not to let her suffer for what was done for his Majesty, but to order the payment of 150 pounds to Edw. Butler, who on Lord Arlington's declaring that he had neither knowledge nor orders about it, threw her into prison."[3] Mrs. Behn

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[1] Calendar of State Papers, 1666-1667, p.371.

[2] Summers, op. cit., I, p.XXV. (This information is inferred from the fact that her obligations which caused her to be imprisoned were to Edward Butler for 150 pounds.)

[3] Calendar of State Papers 1668, p.127.

had served her country faithfully; her country, through the negligence of its proper authorities, had allowed this zealous and courageous woman to be thrown into debtor's prison. There is no record of the term of imprisonment, but we hope it was not long until she was, through the kindness of some benefactor, released to begin the new life which includes the literary portion of her career.

It is impossible to say how Mrs. Aphra Behn spent the time between her release from debtor's prison and the production of her first play in 1670. Bernbaum and Summers disagree. Since Bernbaum discredits the information given in The Life and Memoirs, he would not accept the facts of Aphra's love life as related by One of the Fair Sex or her life in court in contact with Charles II during the years that followed her return to England. On the other hand Summers would assume that to insure herself against further financial difficulties and embarrassments, Mrs. Behn accepted the protection of some admirer about 1669, for he says:

> She was unconventional as many another woman of letters has been since in relation to later times and manners, as unhampered and free as her witty successor, Mrs. de la Revière Manley, who lived for so long as Alexander Barber's kept mistress and died in his house. Mrs. Behn has given us poetic pseudonyms for many of her lovers, Lycidas, Lysander, Philaster, Amintas, Alexis, and the rest, but these extended over many years, and attempts at identification, however interesting, are fruitless.[1]

Immediately contradicting himself he adds in a note that "Amintas repeatedly stands for John Hoyle. In Our Cabal, however ..., Hoyle is dubbed Lycidas."[2] Summers is not to be trusted in such

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[1] Summers, op. cit., p.XXVIII.

[2] Ibid., note 1, p.XXVIII.

uncorroborated statements.

Let us assume, then, that Mrs. Behn spent the time between 1668 and 1670 enjoying the gay life of London in association with her friends old and new, conversing and sharing her unique experiences, learning perhaps the way into the literary circles, strengthening her foothold in the theater where she was already acquainted, if only through correspondence with Thomas Killigrew, who may have had some part in influencing her choice of a career; in short, she was, perhaps without realizing it, fitting herself for the work which was to earn her bread during the last twenty years of her life. Having lived almost thirty years of a life full of varied experiences and possessing a talent of creative expressiveness and vast imagination, Mrs. Behn chose a career which she was well qualified to pursue -- that of a writer. She had been born into an English home of good stock; she had experienced a long sea voyage; she had enjoyed the novelty of life in an English colony; she had, either before her return to England or afterwards, married Mr. Behn, the merchant, and become his widow; she had seemingly known political prestige and prosperity; she had been a spy in Holland; she had endured extreme poverty and despair; she had been thrown into debtor's prison and released into a London prosperously reconstructing after the Great Fire. Was she not then in a position to choose and arrange her life as she wanted it to be?

In December, 1670, Aphra Behn was launched into the world of drama and the theatre with the presentation of her first play, a tragi-comedy, entitled The Forc'd Marriage; or The Jealous

Bridegroom at the Duke's Theatre then in Lincoln's Inn Fields.[1] Although the play enjoyed a run of six days, considered good in the Restoration playhouse, its failure to be better received is said to have been the fault of the actors.[2] In this connection is told the incident concerning the beginning of the friendship between Mrs. Behn and Thomas Otway, then nineteen years old. Otway, desiring to have a try as an actor, was given by Mrs. Behn the part of the King in the play, "but he being not us'd to the stage, the full house put him to such a sweat and tremendous agony, being dash'd spoilt him for an actor."[3]

By the time her third play, The Dutch Lover, which followed The Amorous Prince (May, 1671), was produced at Dorset Gardens (whence the Duke's Theater had moved) in February, 1673,[4] Mrs. Behn had become a recognized figure. This play was, however, no great success, for Mrs. Behn herself in "An Epistle to the Reader" complains:

> this Play was hugely injur'd in the Acting, for 'twas done so imperfectly as never any was before... My Dutch Lover spoke but little of what I intended for him, but supplied it with a great deal of idle stuff, which I was wholly unacquainted with until I heard it first from him....Lastly my Epilogue was promis'd me by a Person who had surely made it good, if any, but he failing of his word, deput'd one, who has made it as you see, and to make out your pennyworth you have it here.[5]

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[1] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of the Restoration Drama 1660-1700, pp.255, 352.

[2] John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, p.34.

[3] Ibid., p.34.

[4] Nicoll, op. cit., p.352.

[5] Summers, op. cit., pp.224-225.

For three years thereafter Mrs. Behn neither wrote nor produced a play. Whether this was the result of her success in gaining reputation, friends, and money or whether her disappointment in the production of her last play discouraged her writing is not known. This period of rest, however, did not spoil her prolificacy, for in 1676 four plays were produced in rapid succession. September brought the tragedy, Abdelazer; December, The Town Fop; February, The Debauchee, a comedy ascribed to Mrs. Behn, but not published with her other works; and in March, The Rover, Part I,[1] the best known and most successful of Mrs. Behn's ~~drama~~ plays. It met with complete success, remained one of the stock plays of the Duke's Theater, and was revived again and again during the eighteenth century.[2]

The success of The Rover, I, is said to be in consequence of its being credited to a male author, for despite the fact that Mrs. Behn was a very gifted woman, her success depended upon her ability to write like a man. The literary world of her day belonged to the men, and her intrusion as the first woman to make her living by her pen was naturally resented by the masculine writers who were clamoring for their own success. At times Mrs. Behn felt obliged to defend her position and did so feelingly. In "An Epistle to the Reader" preceding The Dutch Lover (1673), which was damned on the first night by a Fop in the pit who pre-

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., pp.352-353.

[2] Summers, op. cit., I, p.5.

dicted a poor play because it was a woman's, she maintains that her writings are as good as those of the male wits who have the benefit of education which seems little advantage in dramatic writing:

> For waving the examination why women having equal education with men, were not as capable of knowledge, of whatsoever sort as well as they: I'll only say as I have touch'd before, that Plays have no great room for that which is men's great advantage over women, that is Learning.[1]

By 1687 when The Lucky Chance was presented, she had become more vehement in her defense, for much of the criticism which came to that play came, she thought, because it was written by a woman. She summarizes the argument that she presents in the "Preface" to the play:

> And this is one thing I will venture to say, though against my Nature because it has a Vanity in it: That had the Plays I have writ come forth under any Man's Name, and never known to have been mine; I appeal to all unbyast Judges of Sense, if they had not said that Person had made as many good Comedies, as any one Man that has writ in our Age; but a Devil on't the Woman damns the Poet.[2]

In the succeeding years, undaunted by criticisms and jealousies, she continued to produce her plays. During 1677, 1678, and 1679 the comedies, as each preceding one had been, were still comedies of intrigue, a genre in which Mrs. Behn seemed to excell. Sir Patient Fancy, in January, 1677/8 was followed by The Feign'd Curtezans in March, 1679. The latter is said by

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[1] Summers, op. cit., p.224.

[2] Summers, op. cit., III, p.186.

Nicoll to be "typically of the intrigue type as intrigue appeared toward the close of the century."[1] In that same year there appeared a play, The Young King, which carried a new note, the presentation of a moral problem in the intrigue. Nicoll says:

> Peculiarly enough Mrs. Behn was the first in this age to raise her voice against the fashionable vices of the time, to preach a return to more natural modes of life, and to present a genuine problem in her comedies.[2]

The second part of The Rover, which came out in 1680, was a reversion to the intrigue type; and as a sequel of the original play by that name, suffering "the fate of most sequels soon was banished from the boards,"[3] was the last of the "intrigues." The new decade brought with it plays with a different atmosphere.

The years 1678 to 1683 were full of political unrest and excitement, climaxed in the disturbing plots of Titus Oates and his accomplices, the traitorous ambition and rascalities of Shaftesbury, the deceit and weakness of Monmouth, the open disloyalty of the Whigs, and the rivalry in party politics. These political storms calmed; there followed a literary flailing of the persons and situations which had contributed to the upheaval.[4] Mrs. Behn, along with other Tory loyals, did her part by writing in 1681-82 two comedies, The Roundheads and The City Heiress,

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p.211.

[2] Ibid., p.254.

[3] Summers, op. cit., I, p.112.

[4] Ibid., pp.XLI-XLII.

both "true-blue Protestant" comedies. The False Count (1682), a comedy which was well received and remained popular for about twenty years,[1] is sometimes erroneously classified as a political play. Though the Prologue proclaims Mrs. Behn a converted Whig, there is nothing in the content of the play to justify such a classification.

After writing this group of plays, Mrs. Behn began to direct her talents into other channels. In 1684 two volumes were published: Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister, (commonly attributed to Mrs. Behn; although they are supposed to be the correspondence between Forde, Lord Grey and his sister-in-law, Lady Harriette Berkeley), and A Voyage to the Island of Love,[2] a translation from the French. About this time she was also probably writing novels, for The Adventure of the Black Lady, The King of Batam, and The Unfortunate Happy Lady, though not published until after her death, are supposed by Mr. Summers to have been written in 1683-1684.[3]

From two letters written to Jacob Tonson in 1685 we learn that Mrs. Behn was again suffering financial stresses. The first dated August, 1685, states:

> Tonson has bound himself for 6 pounds which she owed Mr. Baggs the treasurer of the Theater Royal , in case the debt is not paid by Michaelmas, to stop it on the moneys in his hands 'upon the playing her first play.'[4]

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[1] Summers, op. cit., III, p.98.

[2] Summers, op. cit., I, p.XLV. [3] Ibid., pp.XLVI-XLVII.

[4] Historical MSS. Commission Reports, No. 1, II, p.70.

The second:

> Thanks him for the service he has done her with Dryden in whose esteem she would rather choose to be than anybody in the world. Angry with Creech [Thomas Creech, the classic scholar], thinks her verses worth 30 pounds; hopes he will find 'em worth 25 pounds; asks him to speak to his brother to advance the price 5 pounds more, Cowley's David lost because it was a large book; Mrs. Philip's play for the same reason. Begs hard for 5 pounds.[1]

Since she, Dryden, and Creech all made translations from the Latin, it is possible that there had been some misunderstanding between her and Creech in which Dryden had taken her part. The disagreement may have had something to do with the commendatory verses which Mrs. Behn contributed, as did Otway, Tate, Waller, and others, to the second edition of Creech's translation of Lucretius; or in her need, Mrs. Behn may have been asking 30 pounds for her translation of Le Voyage de l'Isle d'Amour by Abbé Tellament, for in the original letter quoted by Summers we find:

> ...you cannot think what a pretty thing ye Island will be and what a deal of labor I shall have yet with it: and if that pleases, I will do the 2d Voyage which will compose a little book as big as a novel by itself.[2]

"Mr. Cowley's David" is his long poem of four books based on the Biblical story of David and some play by Mrs. Philips (possibly her translation of Corneille's Pompei). ~~which~~ The Poem Mrs. Behn feels has been hampered by its length. She was using every means to justify

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[1] Historical MSS. Commission Reports, No. 1, II, p.70.

[2] Summers, op. cit., I, p.XLVI.

...you cannot shield what a man's thinking
...with [illegible] by and hand a [illegible] of liquor I give
...with [illegible] and if that [illegible] I will
...[illegible] which [illegible] a little book on
...a [illegible] [illegible].

her request for the extra five pounds for which she evidently had urgent need.

The death of Charles II in February, 1685, together with the accession of James II, evoked, quite naturally and according to custom, a flood of State Poems to which Mrs. Behn added her Pindarick on the Death of Charles II, which was very popular, and her Poem to the Queen Dowager Catherine, plus a Poem on the Happy Coronation of His Sacred Majesty in honor of James II.

In December, 1686, she returned to the playhouse to present the rather lively comedy, The Lucky Chance, which, received with great favor, was revived for a decade or more. The following year in March she produced a real farce, The Emperor of the Moon, occasioned by the Duke of Albemarle's voyage to Jamaica.

The last two or three years of Mrs. Behn's life were spent in ill-health for which she excuses the verse that she sent along with her Elegiac Ode to the memory of Edmund Waller, who died October 21, 1687.

> in excuse for mine Madam I can only say I am very ill and I have been dying this twelve month that they want those Graces and that spirit which possibly I might have drest 'em in had my health and dulling vapors permitted me.[1]

In spite of her illness the output of her work during the last months of her life was considerable: in 1688 a translation of Fontenelle's Theory of the System of Several New Inhabited Worlds with an "Essay on Translated Prose" as a preface; in the same year

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[1] Summers, op. cit., I, p.LI.

The Fair Jilt, Oroonoko, and Agnes de Castro; also poems entitled Lycidus, a Voyage from the Island of Love and a Congratulatory Poem, written to Queen Mary of Modena on her expectation of the Prince; in the early months of 1689 the sixth book of Cowley's Trees translated into English verse; the publication of two novels, The Lucky Mistake and The History of the Nun, which had been licensed in October, 1688; and finally a poem of congratulation to Mary, the wife of William of Orange, To Her Sacred Majesty, Queen Mary on her Arrival in England.[1]

The last fact of Mrs. Behn's life is consistently the same: she died on April 16, 1689, and is buried in Westminster Abby under a marble stone, upon which is inscribed two lines that were penned, it is supposed, by the John Hoyle whom Mr. Summers believes to have been her lover.[2]

> Here lies a proof that wit can never be
> Defence enough against mortality.

Two of Mrs. Behn's plays were produced after her death: The Widow Ranter in 1690 and The Younger Brother in 1696. Neither met with a very good reception.

Although the number is extremely limited, it is interesting to find some of the contemporary estimates of the first woman dramatist. We find two references among the works of Dryden; one of them is not very complimentary; she would have greatly desired both of them to be so, for she wished to stand well in his

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[1]Summers, op. cit., III, p.388.

[2]Summers, op. cit., I, pp.XXXIII-XXXVI.

opinion.[1] In one instance he condemns her looseness:

> 'Tis an unprofitable Art to those who profess it; but you who write only for your diversion, may pass your hours in pleasure in it, and without Prejudice, always avoiding (as I know you will) the Licenses which Mrs. Behn allowed herself of writing loosely and giving (if I may have leave to say so) some scandal to the Modesty of her Sex.[2]

In the other he praises her translation of Cowley's poem:

> That of Oenone to Paris is in Cowley's way of imitation only. I was desired to say that the author who is of the fair sex understood not Latin. But if she does not, I am afraid she has given us occasion to be ashamed we do.[3]

In connection with her translation we have also Alexander Gosart's estimate of it in his edition of the Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Alexander Cowley:

> Following Mrs. Aphra Behn's rendering of B. VI, 'Of Trees' (Cowley's Latin poem De Plantarum in six books has been translated into English, one book by I. O., one by J. O., three by Nahum Tate, and the last by Mrs. Behn) which is furnished completely will be found selections of such portions from the others as best represent the original and that are themselves somewhat poetical. I have selected Mrs. Behn's contributions to these Translations to be reprinted as a whole, for two reasons: (1) Because she was a woman of undoubted genius, whatever her morale was. (2) This Book is fairly typical for the unlearned Reader of the work De Plantarum.[4]

In poetry besides the lines of Lady Anne Winchelsea

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[1] Historical MSS. Commission Reports, op. cit., p.70.

[2] The Letters of Dryden, C. E. Ward, ed., Letter 69, "Dryden to Eliz. Thomas," p.127.

[3] Essays of John Dryden, W. P. Ker, ed., "Preface to the Translations of Ovid's Epistle," p.243.

[4] Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Abraham Cowley, Alexander Gosart, ed., II, Note on p.236.

already quoted,[1] I have found other poems containing lines in praise of Mrs. Behn. One by Lord Lansdowne:

To Aphra Behn

Two warrior chiefs the voice of fame divide
Who best deserv'd, not Plutarch could decide:
Behold two mightier conquerors appear,
Some for your wit, some for your eyes declare;
Debates arise, which captivates the most,
And none can tell the charm by which he's lost.
The bow and quiver does Diana bear;
Venus the dove; Pallas the shield and spear:
Poets such emblems to their gods assign,
Hearts bleeding by the dart and pen be thine.[2]

And one among the Poems on Affairs of State which seems to be laudatory but may possibly be ironic:

The Female Laureat

If Afra's worth were needful to be shown
What pen could do it better than her own?
Through all her works a happy warmth does shine,
That renders everything she writes Divine.
Witness her Golden Age, so fam'd a piece,
It has at once outdone both Rome and Greece
'The Nymphs, she says, were free, no nice Disdain
Forbad their joys, or gave their lovers pain;
Ten thousand wanton Cupids you might view,
That scattered lech'rous Darts wher'er they flew;
Here you might see expecting Virgins lie,
And strait young Swains those Virgin Lusts supply.'
This age she paints; and with such great success,
That all things but her charity are less.[3]

Another is undeniably an adverse opinion:

The Female Wit; who next convicted stands,
Not for abusing Ovid's verse, but Sand's:
She might have learned from the ill-borrowed Grace,
(Which little helps the Ruin of her Face)

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[1] "The Circuit Apollo," (Poems), Reynolds, ed., p.72.

[2] The Works of the English Poets, XI, p.18.

[3] Poems on Affairs of State from the Reign of King James the First, To This Present Year 1703, II, pp.146-147.

That Wit, like Beauty, triumphs o'er the Heart,
When more of Nature's seen and less of Art:
Nor strive in Orvid's letters to have shown,
As much of skill and lewdness in her own.
Then let her from the next inconstant Lover,
Take a new copy for a second Rover,
Describe the cunning of a jilting Whore,
From the ill Arts herself has us'd before;
Thus let her write, but paraphrase no more.[1]

What, we ask, was the character of this woman? And we find one answer in an account from a diary of William Oldys, Norroy King-At-Arms:

> As to Mrs. Behn's character, it is allowed that she was of a capacity above most of her sex who oblidged the public, She had ready a command of pertinent expressions, and was of fancy pregnant and fluent: whence it is that she wrote with a facility, spirit, and warmth, especially in amorous subjects, superior to every other poetess of the age, and many of the poets too; so that none among us may, perhaps, more justly be called the English Sappho, equalling her either for description, or perhaps experience, in the flames of love, and excelling in her personal temptation to it; being a graceful comely woman, with brown hair, and a piercing eye, as one picture represents her -- whether the same painted by Mr. Riley I am not positive. I am told, moreover, by one who knew her, that she had a happy vein in determining any disputes or controversies that might arise in company; having such agreeable repartees at hand upon all occasions, and so much descretion in the timing of them that she played them off like winning cards. Mrs. Behn was between forty and fifty years of age at the time of her death, which was hastened by an injudicious physician.[2]

Summers mentions three portraits of Mrs. Behn, one by Mary Beale, one by John Riley, and a third by Sir Peter Lely.[3] Oldys may have

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[1] Poems on Affairs of State, op. cit., I, p.196.

[2] James Yeowell's contribution to Notes and Queries, 2nd Series, XI, p.201. (This quotation is submitted from a diary of Sir Wm. Oldys which had come into the hands of Mr. Yeowell.)

[3] Summers, op. cit., I, p.lxiii.

been referring to any one of the three. Sir Peter Lely is famous for his collection of portraits of the ladies of the Court of Charles II, known as "the Beauties" now at Hampton Court palace.[1] It is possible that his portrait of Aphra is one of the group; if it is, there is another question without an answer: during what year of her life was Aphra, as a lady of the Court, prominent enough to be painted by the State painter?

With many questions concerning the biography of Mrs. Behn still unanswered, I should like to quote, in conclusion, from The Lives and Characters of the English and Dramatic Poets, First begun by Mr. Langbaine improved and continued down to this time by Gildon, 1699. Although it is doubtless one of the first biographical sketches, it may still contain data which are as reliable as any we have found to date.

> This authoress whose name was Aphara, not Astrea, as many have thought, was born in the City of Canterbury in Kent, her surname Johnson; she was admired in her youth for her beauty, as afterwards for her poetic works, in which she excell'd not only all that went before her of her own sex but a great part of her contemporary poets of the other: She had a great facility in writing and much of nature in all she writ, was employed by Charles II in the discovery of the Dutch Intreagues, in the Dutch War, lived belov'd and dy'd lamented by all that knew her, and lies buried in the Cloysters of Westminster Abbey, under a great marble stone, on which is inserted these two verses:
>
> Here lies a proof that wit can never be
> Defence enough against Mortalitie.[2]

The purpose here is not to establish biographical data,

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[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., XIII, p.901.

[2] Langbaine, op. cit., pp.8-9.

but we find the accepted facts of Mrs. Behn's life very interesting because they are somewhat different from the events in the lives of most women of the Restoration period. If the gaps which are now so evident could be filled, the real story would certainly add further light upon the character of Mrs. Behn, upon her relation with the men who were writing during the period, and upon her personal life in its relationship to her own writing. In the chapters which are to follow I shall attempt to establish her status as a writer among the other playwrights, such as Dryden, Etheredge, and Congreve and in a discussion of some aspects of her plays show what contributions, if any, she made to the drama of the Restoration.

Chapter II

A SURVEY OF RESTORATION DRAMA

Directly upon the return of Charles II to the throne in 1660, the doors of the theaters opened wide after an interval of eighteen years. Although the theatrical world was, within a few years, to find itself launched into an epoch of new drama in a new theater, the first plays, theaters, actors, and the management itself were merely a continuation of the old. A large number of persons who had been connected with the theater before 1642 were not only alive but were decidedly active in 1660. Sir Henry Herbert, who had been Master of Revels since 1623, had prepared the theater for its opening immediately after the King's return. Actors who had not performed for almost two decades were eager to be back on the stage; dramatists like James Shirley, Abraham Cowley, John Tatham, Sir William Killigrew, were fervently desirous that the resurgent theater should prosper.[1] The King himself made provision for opening the theater early upon his return by issuing (August 21, 1660) to Sir William Davenant and

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[1] Montague Summers, The Playhouse of Pepys, pp.2-3.

Thomas Killigrew letters patent granting them the right to operate the two theatrical companies which, separately and jointly, held sway during the next forty years.

Davenant and Killigrew are two of the strongest links between the Elizabethan and Restoration drama. Davenant had been writing plays a decade or more before 1642. During the dramatic interregnum he had not been idle but had kept alive an undercurrent of theatrical interest through private dramatic production disguised with music and elaborate scenery and called drolls, masques, or dialogues.[1] In 1656 The Siege of Rhodes, Davenant's opera, was presented at Rutland House in a private performance. The play is not so important for its dramatic merit as for its significance in dramatic history. Davenant was introducing new elements into the playhouse. Little did he realize that his use of movable scenery and the renovation the use of such scenery was to make in the construction of the stage itself were to mark the beginning of the modern theater.[2] Early in the Restoration Davenant revived some of his plays that had been produced before 1642, but most of his contributions were adaptations of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans. Killigrew, who had been writing plays before the close of the theater, wrote several dramas while participating in the royal exile on the continent; some of these he revived after the opening of the theaters, but most of them

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[1]Alfred Harbage, Annals of English Drama 975-1700, pp.120-121.

[2]Nicoll, op. cit., p.31.

remained closet dramas. His principal contribution as a playwright was The Parson's Wedding, an extremely indecent comedy written in 1641,[1] revived in 1663, and acted by a cast made up entirely of women.[2] The two most noteworthy departures from the traditional usuages on the Elizabethan stage, the utilization of movable scenery and the employment of ~~women~~ actresses, were promoted by the two men, who, both as playwrights and theatrical producers, were the main connection with the preceding dramatic period.

Because the offerings of the playhouses had to be changed frequently to enliven the interest of the small audience which attended the theater night after night, because there were not enough dramatists to supply the demand for original plays, and because the taste of the courtiers of 1660 was much the same as that of the Cavaliers of the Caroline period, Elizabethan plays were extensively revived, adapted, and imitated during the first years after the opening of the theaters. It is necessary only to glance at lists of plays[3] that appeared on the stage during those years to realize how prominent the works of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher were in the repertories of both Restoration theaters. Although the names of Elizabethan plays began to appear on the lists less frequently after 1664, the influence of

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[1] Harbage, op. cit., pp.114-115.

[2] Nicoll, op. cit., p.23.

[3] Nicoll, op. cit., Appendix C, pp.348-376; Harbage, op. cit., pp.122-128; Downes, op. cit., pp.3-8.

the pre-commonwealth drama did not fail to make itself felt, more or less, in the dramas of the following years.

It is also worthwhile to note that with the Restoration there appeared a number of dramatic pieces which gave expression to the bitter Cavalier sentiment which had been confined during the commonwealth. Many of these were not produced on the stage, but there are several political plays which did appear in open attack upon Cromwell and his followers. Nicoll classes the authors of such plays, Tatham, Cowley, and Howard, as imitators of Jonson and his comedy of humor.[1] The Rump; or, The Mirror of the Late Times, which was produced at Whitefriars in Dorset Court in 1660, had been written by John Tatham before that date. A bitter satire upon "the late times" of Cromwell, it does not spare either the "late" leaders or their wives. No attempt is made to conceal their identity; although Tatham has employed the trick of inverting names -- Bertlam for Lambert, Woodfleet for Fleetwood. When the "sins of forty-one" were being revived in eighty-one, Mrs. Behn revised The Rump into her timely comedy, The Roundheads. Cowley's play was Cutter of Coleman Street (1661), a satire against the Puritans and a revision of his own play, The Guardian of 1641; Sir Robert Howard expressed his rancor toward the Commonwealth in The Committee (1662) as John Lacy did in The Old Troop (1665).

In addition to the Elizabethan influences upon the drama of the Restoration, there were foreign influences springing from

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[1]Nicoll, op. cit., pp.199-202.

the court taste which had become Europeanized by the sojourn of the King and his followers on the continent. It is no more possible to ignore the influence of foreign models, French, Spanish, and Italian, in a study of Restoration drama than it is possible to overlook the Elizabethan traditions and the spirit of the age itself. The heroic tragedies which flourished from 1660 to 1677 derived characteristics from all three sources. The chief sponsors of this type of drama are Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, Dryden, and Sir Robert Howard. Although Orrery introduced plays written in rimed couplet and Howard helped popularize the species, Dryden was responsible for establishing and developing the form. The rise and fall of heroic tragedy may be traced through his works. Having found The Siege of Rhodes lacking in certain things he thought necessary in a heroic play, Dryden determined to write plays more in accord with rules which he was to set forth himself. From the first his dramas tended to have larger, fuller, more intricate plots, characters more heroic and noble, numerous scenes of noise and murder and the clamor of battle, and were more refined in language than many others.[1] The Indian Queen (1663/4) and The Indian Emperour (1665) follow his pattern of the rimed heroic; Tyrannic Love (1669) has the first of the notorious rantings which became a marked characteristic of the heroic tragedy of the next decade. With The Conquest of Granada (1670), which is prefaced by the famous Essay of Heroic Plays, the heroic drama rose to its greatest height.

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., pp.93, 100.

Dryden's last rimed tragedy, Aureng-Zebe (1675), is somewhat modified in style. Apparently he had lost interest in his theory and had become tired of rime, for his next tragedy, All for Love (1678), is a return to blank verse and Shakesperian theme.

In the meantime Dryden had not devoted his entire effort to the heroic play; he had made some contribution to comedy as well. In his first comedy, The Wild Gallant (1663), he presented the pair of witty lovers who became the prototypes of the heroes and heroines of almost every comedy of the period. They are used by Mrs. Behn in her comedies of intrigue and by Etherege in his comedy of manners. Sir Martin Mar-All (1667), an adaptation of Molière's L'Etourdi, was Dryden's most popular comedy. His other comedy of the decade, An Evening's Love (1668), carries with it, in the printed form, a critical preface which reveals Dryden's comic theory and shows, according to Nicoll, how firmly Dryden stood in the parting of the ways between Jonson's humors and Congreve's comedy of manners:

> Noting Jonson's lack of repartee, he yet praises his humours, and ends by desiring a comedy with 'neither so little of Humour as Fletcher shows, nor so little of Love and Wit as Jonson'.... in those words is prophesied the comedy of manners.[1]

The year 1664 inaugurated a new period in English dramatic literature. Whether or not Etherege was aware that Love in a Tub was to be the first of the species of comedy that belongs exclusively to Restoration drama, he was, we find in the

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[1]Nicoll, op. cit., p.217.

Prologue, conscious that he was breaking away from Elizabethan tradition. Real Restoration comedy, the comedy of manners, began with Love in a Tub; George Etherege, with his first play, had established the species. The audience realized that they were seeing something new; they recognized themselves, their own society, their own witty conversation upon the stage. And that is the key to the success of the play which, in Langbaine's words, "met with general applause."[1] Etherege had seen in the life about him the picture that he wanted to present on the stage. A part of the society, a typical figure, a "fop at heart," known as "Easy Etherege," "Gentle George," he was the personification of the attitude the courtiers of Charles II's day assumed toward life. Having accepted that life and society, that lazy conformity to style and artificial standards, those manners and customs as part of his world, he wrote them into his comedy. If, according to the moral standards of other generations, the plays of Etherege, and of other writers of the period, seem immoral and indecent in the use of language and actions, condemnation should not be laid upon the authors who merely picture the life as it was, but rather upon the life of which they were a part. The gallant who drank, gambled, swore, and indulged in other vices of the age; the witty, vivacious, not too virtuous young lady; the fop, portrayed in perfection by Etherege in Sir Fopling Flutter (1676), were types that became the stock-in-trade of all comedies of the age and precursors of the types perfected by

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[1] Langbaine, op. cit., p.53.

Congreve in Mirabell and Millamant. It is Dryden, however, who is given credit for the invention of the pair of lovers who are used effectively by the playwrights of the manners school. Etherege established another precedent of the period in his use of the rimed couplet in the heroic love plot. The comic subplot, suggestive of the French influence, which I discuss elsewhere, is conducted in prose. The importance of Love in a Tub is not in the merit of the play, but in the effect it had upon many of the plays that followed it. Etherege's second comedy, She Would If She Could (1668), is a better play, doubtless because he was more certain of what he was trying to accomplish.[1] The lovers with whom the author is much concerned in the play are skillfully extracted from London life and set upon the stage in a scene of the ordinary houses, streets, and parks with which the audience were familiar. The author's style of dialogue runs smoothly, the lovers fit naturally and easily into the everyday setting. She Would If She Could, though spoiled in the acting, was recognized as the best comedy written since Love in a Tub.[2] Etherege had introduced and improved upon a type of comedy that he was to submit eight years later in a finished form. The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter (1676), Etherege's last comedy, was quite successful upon the stage. Noted for the characterizations of Sir Fopling, Dorimant and Harriet, the lovers, in its accurate portrayal of the life of the time and its witty dialogue, it

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[1] Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, p.63.

[2] John Palmer, The Comedy of Manners, p.75.

brings the comedy of manners to its full growth.

The decade 1671-1681 was to mark some changes in the drama of the period. The comedy of the decade is, in some instances, a continuation of what had been begun before 1670. Dryden, ~~who was~~ whose plays were a part of the drama through almost forty years of development, wrote Marriage à la Mode (1672), a tragicomedy whose appeal lies mainly in the comic plot; The Assignation (1672), a poorly written comedy; The Kind Keeper; or, Mr. Limberham (1678), also a poorly written comedy, which brought Dryden much of his reputation for licentiousness;[1] and The Spanish Friar (1680), considered by many critics a good play. Dryden did not then write another comedy until 1690.

Before the appearance of The Man of Mode the comedy of manners had been taken up by other writers, the most important of whom was William Wycherley. Etherege's plays are a perfect transcription of his age, an expressive picture of the period; Wycherley's plays are moral satires directed furiously against the vices of his age.[2] Within five years Wycherley produced four comedies, the only plays that he wrote. Love in a Wood (1671), closely akin to Etherege with some delightful scenes that approach his quick wit, is an unpolished piece which lacks easiness of style, unity, and strong characterization. The main business of the play is manners, but there are numerous bits of the bitter satire that Wycherley used in his later comedies. The Gentleman

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[1]Nicoll, op. cit., p.218.

[2]Palmer, op. cit., p.92.

Dancing Master (1672), an adaptation from the Spanish, is simply constructed with movement that is light and swift. The lightness is again clouded by the author's satire. The Country Wife (1674/5), a forceful satire, is known for the clever "China" scene of Hornor. The Plain Dealer (1676), the last of Wycherley's comedies, is a satire upon the infidelity and foppishness of the time, proclaimed indecent in its attempt to depict the evils of the society as odious. Based upon Molière's Misanthrope, it is a far cry from the French original. Wycherley had, in his four comedies, ventured into something new, but in bringing satire into the comedy of manners, he had introduced emotion into a type of drama that was purely intellectual, and in so doing had paved the way for the growth of the sentimental comedy which reached the peak of development much later, in the eighteenth century.

Wycherley, however, was not the first Restoration playwright to venture into the field of sentimentalism. In 1676 Mrs. Behn adapted George Wilkins' The Miseries of Enforced Marriage into a Restoration comedy entitled The Town Fop; or, Sir Timothy Tawdrey. Mrs. Behn preserved the Elizabethan sentimentalism, in an extensively modified form, by invoking the pity of the audience for Bellmour and Celinda, who are the victims of a forced marriage.[1] But Mrs. Behn did not continue to write comedies of sentiment; the audience was not to be ready for sentimental moralizing for two or more decades, and Mrs. Behn was writing for the audience, not for immortal fame in dramatic

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[1]Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, pp.50-52.

history. Other playwrights of the period allowed an element of sentiment to creep, from time to time, into their comedies. Etherege mixed a bit of sentiment with the wit in the subplot of The Comical Revenge (1664);[1] Wycherley's four comedies admitted satire that is bitter rather than pathetic; Shadwell and Congreve included occasional scenes with a touch of pathos or passingly portrayed an exemplary character.[2]

Thomas Shadwell, whose imitation of the Jonsonian style of comedy carried on the English line of tradition, wrote most of his plays during the 1670 decade. His first play, The Sullen Lovers (1668) attracted attention with its satire upon Sir Robert Howard[3] and brought its author triumphantly into the theatrical world. The Humorist (1670), full of satire upon some of the follies and vices of the age, was not successful.[4] The Miser (1671), but an adaptation of Molière's L'Avare, is a rather unimportant play; although it does bear evidence of an inclination toward the wit which is the mark of the manners school.[5] Epsom Wells (1672), which more nearly approaches the manners style in its portrayal of contemporary life, was Shadwell's best and most successful play, holding the stage until 1726.[6] The next two plays, The Tempest (1674) and Psyche (1674/5), are Shadwell's

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[1] Bernbaum, op. cit., p.63.

[2] Ibid., p.71.

[3] Nicoll, op. cit., p.191.

[4] Ibid., p.192.

[5] Ibid., pp.192-193.

[6] Ibid., p.123.

contribution to the dramatic opera. Before 1680 Shadwell wrote four other comedies, The Libertine (1675), an attack upon Settle, in blank verse; The Virtuoso (1676); A True Widow (1677/8), a complete failure on the stage, exposing the "crying sin of Keeping"; and The Woman Captain (1679), which shows less of Jonson's influence than any of the other plays.[1] Shadwell had set out to follow the design of Jonson and did so, to an extent, in his characterizations and satire, but never with the genius of Jonson.[2] He continued writing plays to the end of the century, but as the comedy of humor had lost its appeal to the Restoration audience by 1680, he began to produce comedies, some of which showed traces of sentimentalism, and others, evidences of the comedy of manners.[3]

Mrs. Behn's connection with the comedy of intrigue is much the same as Shadwell's relation to the comedy of humor. Each is the chief exponent of the respective type of comedy. Before Mrs. Behn wrote her first comedy of Spanish intrigue, The Dutch Lover (1672), Spanish drama had already gained a popular foothold in England through Samuel Tuke's Adventure of Five Hours (1663), which, it is said, was written at Charles' suggestion, and through similar plays of Thomas Porter and Sir Thomas St Serfe. Altogether Mrs. Behn wrote six intrigue plays. In addition to The Dutch Lover, four of the comedies which were set

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[1]Nicoll, op. cit., pp.193-195.

[2]Ashley Thorndike, English Comedy, p.287.

[3]Nicoll, op. cit., p.206.

in Spain, The Debauchee (1676), the two parts of The Rover (1677 and 1680), and The Feign'd Courtezans (1679), belong in the class of Spanish intrigue; Sir Patient Fancy (1677/8), definitely of the intrigue variety, is set in London. After the decade in which Mrs. Behn kept the species alive few comedies of intrigue worth special mention were written. The type disappeared from the stage long before the close of the century.

Although the year 1678 marks the beginning of a new kind of tragedy, it does not mark the end of the heroic tragedy which Dryden had tried to perfect in previous years. Such dramatists as Lee, Settle, Tate, and Crowne continued to write in their heroic style. Dryden himself did not abandon some of the characteristics of the heroic play (mainly, the spectacular scenes, bombastic speeches, and the love and honor theme), but he did turn to Shakespeare for the subject and verse form of All for Love (1678), the play which marks his conversion to blank verse and tragedy in the Elizabethan tradition. Both Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee began their dramatic careers with heroic plays but succeeded to fame with tragedies in blank verse. Lee's The Rival Queens (1677), which anticipated Dryden's use of blank verse, was his best and most popular play. Otway reached the height of success in The Orphan (1680) and Venice Preserved (1682), both successful combinations of heroic elements, classic influence, and a pathetic, sentimental touch.

From 1679 to 1685 were years of keen religious and political unrest caused by the judicial murders, the Popish Plot, the conflict between the King and Parliament, and the generally

unsettled times. During this era there appeared in the theater some religious and political satires which made the stage the scene of a verbal war among the dramatists. If the plays themselves were not contributory to the controversy, then the prologues and epilogues were. Some of the plays were so severe in their satire that they were temporarily banned from the stage. Among them were Dryden and Lee's Duke of Guise (1682), Crowne's Henry the Sixth, part I (1681) and The City Politiques (1682). Mrs. Behn, brought out two political comedies, The Roundheads (1681) and The City Heiress (1681/2), both of which expressed her loyalty to the monarch. Another of her comedies, The Younger Brother, which was revised and presented on the stage in 1696 by Charles Gildon, was at least partially written about this time. Gildon admits his substitution of the rake-hell scene in the first act for a political scene which, written in the early '80's, might have been offensive in '96. By 1683 the political fury had waned, and by 1685, the year of Charles' death, the political references had become less bitter and had almost disappeared from the theater.

The political unrest and the banning of a number of plays from the stage caused the theaters to undergo such financial losses that it became necessary, in 1682, to unite the patents of Killigrew and Davenant into one company. Until the union was again dissolved in 1695, the playhouses passed through rather difficult times. The number of plays written and produced had become scant; few of the old dramatists were writing, so that by 1693 the theater was ready for the new life brought in by

Congreve with his return to the comedy of manners, which for almost twenty years had been neglected.

Like Wycherley, Congreve wrote only four comedies. His first, The Old Bachelor (1693), brought its author immediate success and recognition in the theatrical world. An example of the comedy of manners, the play lacks only the polish and refinement that Congreve attained in his later plays. The Double Dealer (1693), somewhat sentimental in tone, was not as well received as the first comedy. Love for Love (1695), the first play to be presented at the new theater at Lincoln's Inn Fields, was a stage success. Congreve's best comedy, The Way of the World (1700) was not well received by the audience, but the brilliant character portrayal of Mirabell and Millamant and their witty dialogue make it the masterpiece of the comedy of manners.

Whereas the comedy of manners reached the peak of perfection in Congreve's last comedy, its inevitable decline had already begun in the plays of Sir John Vanbrugh and George Farquhar written before the close of the century. Vanbrugh is best known for his two plays of the seventeenth century, The Relapse (1696) and The Provoked Wife (1697), neither of which added anything new to the development of the type, but both of which deserve to be classified with the comedies of Etherege and Congreve. In Farquhar, the so-called "school" of the comedy of manners came to a close. He is not as well known for his two comedies of the seventeenth century, Love in a Bottle (1698) and The Constant Couple (1699), as he is for The Recruiting Officer (1706) and The Beaux Stratagem (1707), which, though somewhat

different from the comedy of manners, contain a kind of afterglow of the earlier plays.

With the waning of the comedy of manners, there was a growing tendency toward the drama of sensibility and a moral reaction against the indecencies of the Restoration drama. Although, as we have noted already, there were slight traces of sentimentalism evident in the works of some of the dramatists of the Restoration, Colley Cibber's Love's Last Shift (1696) marks the real beginning of sentimentalism. No distinct departure from the style of Restoration comedy is noticeable; no direct moralizing is evident in the play, but the tone of the whole comedy is clearly sentimental. Two years later a definite attack against the immorality of the Restoration stage was made in Jeremy Collier's A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. Though the attack gave rise to a great deal of controversy, it is doubtful that the piece itself was very influential upon the drama. It was, possibly, representative of the feeling of the age which was ready for a change. After 1698 The Way of the World and the plays of Vanbrugh and Farquhar came out, but other writers began to follow the style of Cibber, and during the eighteenth century the Restoration comedies which were still on the boards found themselves rivaled by the new comedy of sentiment.

During the forty year period of the Restoration the stage had sponsored the rise and fall of several "schools" of comedy. The first decade saw the beginning of the comedy of humors, the Elizabethan romances, the comedy of intrigue, the

comedies of Dryden, and in Etherege, the initial comedy of manners which was to be carried into the eighteenth century. There were also the origins of the sentimental comedy, which was to reach its height of development in the next century. These, then, were the kinds of comedy current in the age which produced the first professional woman playwright, whose forte was to be the writing of plays in the tradition of the day.

Chapter III

COMEDIES OF INTRIGUE

The Amorous Prince

The Amorous Prince; or, the Curious Husband, Mrs. Behn's first comedy, was presented at Lincoln's Inn Fields by the Duke's Company in May, 1671. No performers' names are given. Although the play is said by Summers to have met with a very good reception at the time, there is no evidence of any popularity advanced, nor is there a record of further presentation. Since this is the author's first comedy, one might expect that she would follow certain previously successful patterns of comedy. This, I believe, she does. For example, the Curious Impertinent, a source of this play, had been used by numerous authors during the century. Too, the mixture of comic and rather serious tones may be a "throwback" to the Jacobean tragi-comedy pattern. In fact, this play -- probably because she is feeling her way -- remains her only one with two distinct plots, one of which is a serious romance while the other is a witty intrigue comedy.

The setting of the play is Florence, but aside from the Italian names given the characters, there is little to remind the

reader of that detail. In the period it was quite proper for the playwright to name a foreign setting, as Mrs. Behn does here and in most of the intrigue comedies, while in reality the action has a background that was entirely Restoration London.

Mrs. Behn constructs two plots of almost equal importance around selected groups of characters. One group consists of Frederick, the Prince, who portrays the carefree, amorous young gallant; Curtius, his friend, who upholds the ideal of honorable and virtuous love; Cloris, the sister of Curtius; Laura whom Curtius loves; and Lorenzo, her brother. The other group includes Antonio, a nobleman with a beautiful and virtuous wife, Clarina; Alberto, Antonio's close and worthy friend; Ismena, Antonio's sister who loves Alberto; and Isabella, the woman to Clarina. The theme around which Mrs. Behn weaves the plot involving the latter group is her version of Cervantes' Curioso Impertinente from Don Quixote, Book IV, ch. 6-8, in which Anselmo, the curious Impertinente, enforces his closest friend, Lothorio, to tempt his beautiful wife Camilla. The friend and wife fall in love; but to convince Anselmo that his jealous suspicions are groundless and to free themselves from his watchfulness, they stage a scene which he witnesses. Having accomplished their purpose, the couple lives "in sin" until fear of discovery brings all three to a tragic end. Naturally Mrs. Behn has made alterations necessary to change the course of action from the inevitable tragic ending. By her use of tricks, circumstances, situations, witty and light dialogue, she has produced an intrigue which is

in accord with the best traditions of comedy.[1]

In Act I Mrs. Behn, in the traditional pattern, introduces the principal characters and some of the situations. The opening scene acquaints the reader with the relationship of Cloris and Frederick; in the second scene Frederick boasts of his conquests of Cloris to Curtius who, in "aside" remarks divulges that he resents the Prince's behavior because Cloris is Curtius' sister, a fact of which Frederick remains ignorant until the last act. The third scene, turning to the other theme, gives a suggestion of the Isabella-Lorenzo intrigue and informs the reader, through a conversation among Clarina, Isabella, and Ismena, of the trick the ladies are about to play on Antonio and Alberto. In the fourth scene Antonio discloses to Alberto his plan for trying the fidelity of Clarina; the ladies eavesdrop to learn the details. The first scene of Act II launches Frederick into his pursuit of Laura, while the remainder of the act is devoted to the tricks, intrigues, and complications of the "curious" husband story. Acts III and IV build up the action first of one theme and then of another until the reader is prepared by turns and counterturns, tricks, disguises, and deceits for the thread-tying of the final act and the concluding scene with its reconciliations, forgiveness of the obdurate parent, disclosure of

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[1]Variations of the same theme seem to have been used by various playwrights of the century. Summers gives Davenport's The City Night Cap (licensed 1624) as Mrs. Behn's source. The same idea was used by Beaumont and Fletcher in The Coxcomb (1610), by Nat Fields in Amends for Ladies (1618), and by Southerne in The Disappointment; or, The Mother in Fashion (1684) and in The Married Beau (1694). See Summers, Works, IV, pp.119-120.

secrets, removal of disguises, and happy union of lovers.

Although the plot concerning the Frederick-Curtius group is somewhat romantic and serious in nature with a touch of the pastoral element, Mrs. Behn also includes some of the devices commonly used in intrigue: disguises, sword fights, confusion in the darkness, mistaken identities, and deceptions. The main action, however, deals with the affair of Cloris and Frederick. Without knowing her true identity, the "amorous Prince" falls in love with Cloris, who has been reared as a country maid, and debauches her under promises of marriage. Curtius becomes angry when he learns that his friend has wronged his sister; that anger is magnified when he learns that Frederick has turned from Cloris to seek the love of Laura, the lady Curtius loves. A duel results and Frederick is wounded. In the meantime Cloris, disguising herself in male attire and assuming the name of Philbert, has started, with her boy Gulliam, to Court in search of Frederick, whose faithfulness and honor she has begun to doubt. They witness the fight and Cloris is torn between the joy of seeing her lover and the grief of finding him wounded. Rushing to his aid, she gains admittance to Frederick's confidence and accompanies him to his apartment, where she remains until she is recognized and received in favor. Curtius learns that his sister has left home, and thinking her dead, devises a plan whereby he can kill Frederick to avenge his and Cloris' honor. He disguises himself as a pander and appears in the street distributing pictures of beautiful courtezans. Lorenzo is the recipient of some of the pictures which he takes to Frederick. Frederick arranges to visit the courtezans that evening. When the Prince,

with "Philbert," arrives at the lodgings of the "Beauties," Curtius is waiting with hired bravoes and courtezans to execute his plan.[1] About to shoot Frederick, he is interrupted. In a cleverly executed mask scene the trick is turned. The bravoes prove to be in service of Antonio, who learned the plot through them and decided with Alberto that the Prince should be saved. Clarina, Ismena, Laura, and other ladies have acted as courtezans to deceive Curtius and read Frederick a lesson. Thus the characters are gathered for the closing scene. When Curtius explains his motive in dealing so treacherously with his friend, the Prince forgives him. Cloris' disguise is discovered; Curtius rejoices at finding his sister, and Frederick, learning of her nobility, is only too glad to marry her. Antonio and Clarina are reconciled. Ismena unmasks and the deception is explained so that Alberto receives the one he really loves, Ismena. Salvator, the overbearing father of Laura, arrives and adds his consent when he learns that Frederick has already given Laura to Curtius. Isabella chooses Lorenzo, while Cloris promises Guilliam he shall have Lucia, the country maid. The happy end is achieved.

The real intrigue is developed in the story of the "curious husband." Antonio, justly called the curious husband, enforces his friend, Alberto, to try the virtue of his wife by

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[1]Summers finds Mrs. Behn's device by which Curtius ensnares Frederick a comic version of the tragic trapping of the old Duke by Vendice and Hippolita in Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy. Works, IV, p.120.

pretending to be in love with her. The wife, Clarina, learns of the plan through Isabella, who overheard it in the making. To give vent to the anger she feels toward her doubting husband, she plans with Ismena to revenge his lack of trust. Ismena, who has fallen in love with Alberto and is eager to be the recipient of his professions of love, dresses like Clarina and is the lady on hand each time that Antonio thinks he is leaving his wife alone with Alberto. At first Alberto makes no attempt to make love to "Clarina" because he has fallen in love with her and will not betray his friend. When Antonio learns by spying that Alberto is making no effort to try the virtue of his wife, he is angry. Alberto gives his word that he will carry out the bargain. He professes his suit and finds it well received by "Clarina." They discuss the situation and decide to further deceive Antonio first by telling him of their mutual love and afterwards, counterfeiting, for his benefit a scene in which "Clarina" pretends she would rather slay herself than defame Antonio by loving another. When Antonio's doubts are allayed and he leaves his hiding place, Ismena suggests real dissimulation; for she knows that Alberto has been cheated too. When the truth is known, Alberto is surprised to find that he has never seen the real Clarina and gratefully accepts this Ismena whom he has learned to love; Antonio realizes that he has been quite foolish and is satisfied that he has a faithful virtuous wife and a true friend.

The "mixers" who are responsible for many of the complications are Lorenzo, the fop of the comedy, and Isabella, the woman to Clarina, both stock characters of comedy. Lorenzo retains the favor of the Prince by reporting to him any "Beauties" he

discovers. It is he who admits Frederick to Laura, his sister, and stirs up enmity between him and Curtius; it is he who leads Frederick into the trap set by Curtius. It is from the clever Isabella, however, that he cannot escape. Under the pretext that she will lead him to Clarina, to whom he is attracted, she takes large sums of money. Because she wants to marry him, she entices him into her chamber with the same promise. In the meantime she has sent word to Antonio that a man is within. While Antonio pounds the door for admittance, Isabella will find no way for Lorenzo to get away until he announces that he is her husband. In the final scene when Frederick offers Isabella the husband of her choice, she names Lorenzo, who protests: "Of all cheats, commend me to a Waiting-Gentlewoman; I her husband?" The odds are against him; he accepts. Isabella is also the clever assistant of Ismena and Clarina in their deception of Antonio and Alberto.

Mrs. Behn has portrayed another good comic character in Guilliam, the country fellow, who served Cloris. Still full of his rustic habits he accompanies his mistress in her search for the false Frederick. When Cloris, as a youth, deserts him to follow the wounded Frederick, he is taken into service by Lorenzo, who intends to use him for revenge upon the shrewd Isabella. Dressed in ill-fitting garments acquired in town but still wearing his country boy's hat, he presents a comic figure. The rustic simplicity of his language and his manners untouched by the artificiality of the court make him an incongruous part of the picture. His contribution to the intrigue is a false report to Curtius of Cloris' death.

Mrs. Behn strikes a serious note in the character of Curtius. Virtuous himself he resents the lack of virtue in Frederick. Surprisingly, Lorenzo also sounds a serious note. When he finds Cloris, still disguised as Philbert, in Laura's closet, he is quick to condemn his sister before he realizes that he is being unfair.

> And why the Devil should I expect my Sister should
> Have more Virtue than myself?
> She's the same flesh and blood; or why, because
> She's the weaker Vessel,
> Should all the unreasonable burden of the Honour
> Of our House, as they call it,
> Be laid on her Shoulders, whilst we may commit
> A thousand Villanies?[1]

The tone of seriousness throughout seems to be a little too heavy to admit the spirit of comic lightness that Mrs. Behn attained in some of her later comedies. Her failure to recognize the danger of too much seriousness in comedy and her inexperience, at the time, in writing comedy may have been greatly responsible for the weakness of the play and consequently for its lack of popularity.

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[1]Act V, i.

The Dutch Lover

Mrs. Behn's second comedy, The Dutch Lover, originally presented at the Duke's Theater, Dorset Garden, February 6, 1672/3 follows a conventional pattern. The author uses a version of the pseudo-Spanish novel, The History of Don Ferrise, which relates the story of the incestuous love of Eusemie and Theodore and of Don Juan and Frederick, a theme quite frequently used by other authors throughout the century.[1] She at the same time incorporates several aspects of intrigue which are of her own invention, a sign, I believe, that she was trying her own wings. However, Mrs. Behn suffered a sore disappointment, for the play, which could have been a success only in good acting and close attention to detail, was, as she confesses in the "Epistle To The Reader," "highly injur'd in the acting."

> ... 'twas done so imperfectly as never any was before, which did more harm to this than it could have done to any of another sort; the Plot being

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[1]The same theme was used before the close of the theaters by Beaumont and Fletcher in A King and No King (1611), by Arthur Wilson in The Swizzer (1631); by Middleton in Women Beware Women (1612), by Massinger in The Unnatural Combat (1621), by Ford in Pity She's a Whore (1633); in the Restoration theater by Dryden three times, in The Spanish Friar (1681), Don Sebastian (1690), and Love Triumphant (1693/4), by Otway in The Orphan (1680), by Dryden and Lee in Oedipus (1679), and in The Fatal Discovery; or, Love in Ruins (1698). See Summers, Works, I, pp.218-219.

> busie (though I think not intricate) and so requiring a continual attention, which being interrupted by the intolerable negligence of some that acted in it, must needs spoil the beauty on't. My Dutch Lover spoke but little of what I intended for him; so that Jack-pudding ever us'd to do: which though I knew before, I gave him yet the Part, because I knew him so acceptable to most o' the' lighter Periwigs about Town.[1]

Nor was the acting the only imperfection; she explains also that the costumes of the Dutchman and Alonzo, which should have been ridiculous in their ill-favored likeness, were not as "notably ridiculous" as she had intended. As a third fault, the Epilogue, which had been promised by "a Person who had surely made it good," was a poorly written substitute. Before the printing the Prologue was lost. Mrs. Behn's play seems to have undergone the fate to which it was doomed by the Fop in the pit who warned the spectators "they were to expect a woeful Play, ... for it was a woman's."

The material of The Dutch Lover is a combination of comedy and romance. The comic plot, as the title indicates, is concerned with a wealthy Dutch Fop, Haunce van Ezel, who arrives in Madrid to be married to Euphemia, the beautiful daughter of Carlo and sister of Lovis. The theme is a variation of "over-reaching," traditional in comedy. Euphemia and Alonzo, her lover, assisted by Lovis, succeed in cheating both Carlo and Haunce. Before Haunce has sufficiently recovered from the seasickness of his

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[1] Because Mrs. Behn feels that she cannot proceed with her condemnation of one who is dead, Summers assumes that the actor who spoiled the play was Angel, a leading comedian who died in the spring of 1673. See Summers, Works, I, p.220.

voyage from Holland to pay court to Euphemia, Alonzo, in accord with the suggestions of Lovis, who does not favor Haunce, and of Euphemia, who has fallen in love with him (Alonzo), disguises himself as the Dutchman and appears before Carlo to pay court to his bride. Having been coached by Lovis, he speaks the crude language of the foppish boor and ignores completely the Spanish customs of courtship. Euphemia, knowing that he is Alonzo, is eager to accept him, but her father is repulsed by the idea of forcing her into marriage with such a man, even for his fine fortune. Euphemia insists upon complying with her father's contract, but is afraid her happiness will give away the secret. Plans for the wedding progress. In the meantime, however, unknown to Lovis, the real Haunce calls at the house and is greeted with a familiarity which rather astonishes him. Euphemia is not as cordial as she had been to the other "Haunce" and tells the Dutchman that she will not accept him until he has won her from Alonzo. When he meets Alonzo with Lovis later, his cowardice makes the situation exceedingly comic. Alonzo pretends to concede Euphemia to the Dutch Lover, but still in disguise, marries her himself. His trick is discovered by the appearance of the real Haunce during the wedding festivities. Carlo forgives his daughter and all join in tricking Haunce and Gload who, having joined in a masquerade, find themselves unexpectedly married to Olinda and Doris, two women attendant on Euphemia.

The romantic plot is full of villany, duelling, fighting, jealousy, and love. There are three different actions which are concerned with the family of Ambrosio, a nobleman of Spain. The family includes Marcel, his son; Silvio, a supposed bastard

son; and two daughters, Hippolyta and Cleonte. In one instance, Hippolyta has "over-reached" her father and brother by running away with Antonio, a German, who has debauched her. Marcel is seeking revenge on two scores, upon Antonio for debauching his sister and upon Hippolyte for causing him to break his word to Alonzo, to whom, in Flanders, he promised his beautiful sister. The search for his "wicked" sister is the grave concern of Marcel until he learns, as Hippolyta does after many unhappy experiences, that Antonio has a rightful claim to Hippolyta through a lawful wedding. In another instance, Silvio has an incestuous love for his sister Cleonte. The wicked Francisca, who desires Silvio herself and plans to trick him into her bed, falsely encourages his love. When Silvio learns from a conference with Francisca that Cleonte will yield to him, he is so revolted that he determines to kill her and himself. Marcel, who has overheard the conference, beside himself with rage, dashes on Silvio. The tragic end is averted by Ambrosio, who arriving on the scene and learning the cause of the fight, reveals that Silvio is not his son and, therefore, may rightfully love Cleonte, as Ambrosio had hoped he would. In the third instance, Marcel himself is contracted to the beautiful and wealthy Flavia but is in love with Clarinda. On the night of his assignation with Clarinda, Alonzo is mistaken for Marcel by the woman Dormida and is given the key to Clarinda's apartment. Marcel follows Alonzo into the hall where the two jostle and fight, unknown to each other, in the darkness. Alonzo departs leaving Marcel wounded. Dormida and Clarinda, frightened by the disturbance, run into the street where they throw themselves on Alonzo for honorable protection.

A complete stranger in the city, he leads them to the mansion of Ambrosio and puts them in the care of Cleonte. Marcel sees Clarinda with Silvio, to whom Cleonte has introduced her, and concludes that his brother is the man whom he fought on the previous night. At once they arrange for a duel in a grove near the town. Alonzo interrupts the fighting with the avowal that it was he who caused the confusion with Clarinda. Later when the story of Alonzo's identity is made known, Clarinda, as his sister, receives her portion of their fortune and is given by Alonzo to Marcel, who has been released from his contract with Flavia.

The link between the two plots is Alonzo's connection with both. His original connection should have been with Marcel and Hippolyta, but because Marcel, embarrassed that he cannot offer his sister, avoids him, and because Euphemia pursues him, attracts him, and refuses him without marriage, he becomes involved with the other family.

Haunce van Ezel is the only good comic character in the play; it is he and his man Gload who are responsible for the few laughter-provoking scenes. The title and exploitation of the Dutch fop were perhaps aimed at exploiting and capitalizing upon the contemporary feeling against the Dutch. There is, in fact, no other reasonable explanation for the introduction of a Dutch Fop. He might as well have been Spanish except for the fact of the Dutch wars.

Comic devices are not at all evident in <u>The Dutch Lover</u>, for the romantic element outweighs the comic. However, the whole

is well contrived and exhibits the skill and clever stage craft of the author. The situations are introduced in the usual pattern. In the first act the reader becomes acquainted with the circumstances and all the characters except Haunce and Gload, who do not appear until the action is well under way in Act III. The actions are developed by the use of intrigue devices, many of which are concerned with disguise, false identity, obstacles to love, and jealousy of the "love and honor" variety. The last act presents the conventional conclusion. Three identities are disclosed: Silvio is not the bastard son of Ambrosio, but is the natural son of the great Count d'Olivarez, minister to Philip IV of Spain; Alonzo is not the son of the warrior Alonzo, but is the son of a Lady Octavia and Don Manuel; Clarinda is Alonzo's sister, and with the portion he gives her becomes a worthy bride for the son of the powerful Ambrosio.

Mrs. Behn introduces into Act III a scene with an Elizabethan flavor. Scene iii is set in a grove where we find Antonio asleep on the ground with Hippolyta sitting beside him singing a song. The lyric is followed by a soliloquy which, with the rest of the scene, is quite reminiscent of Shakespeare in style and theme. The lady, stricken with grief for the wrong she has committed by loving Antonio, would stab them both. Antonio awakens and, coaxing her into his arms, removes the dagger from her hand then villanously declares that he did not ravish her for love but for revenge upon her brother Marcel, who won from him the love of Clarinda. Haunce and Gload interrupt the murderous

quarrel which ensues, rescue Hippolyta, and imprison Antonio in their lodging. In the next scene Mrs. Behn has Silvio woo Cleonte with a pastoral dance by "Nymphs and Shepherds" in a rural setting.

Mrs. Behn has permitted the romantic element of the play to outweigh the comic. Whereas she has used many of the devices of intrigue, she has failed to admit the atmosphere of comedy. The incestuous theme and the Hippolyta-Antonio action approach quite near the tragic but are released, in each case, by the introduction of a trick. For example, Ambrosio's announcement of the truth of Silvio's parentage turns the tragic circumstance to a comic conclusion. Antonio's sudden acknowledgement of his real love for Hippolyta and of their marriage saves both of them from Marcel's vengeance. It is the predominance of this serious tone which doubtless prompted Nicoll's statement, which I think is rather appropriate: "Mrs. Behn's The Dutch Lover might be taken as a tragi-comedy variant of the Spanish intrigue type of comedy."[1]

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p.130.

The Rover, I

The first part of The Rover; or, the Banished Cavaliers was presented at the Duke's House, Dorset Garden, in March, 1676/7. From its first presentation the play met with complete success; it became a stock play of the Duke's Company, and Nicoll lists six presentations witnessed by "Royalty" before 1690.[1] It was popular during the first decades of the eighteenth century, but, after an interval of twenty years, was acted for the last time in 1757.[2]

Mrs. Behn evidently experienced some opposition to the printing (it was licensed July 7, 1677)[3] for she has included a "Post-Script" in which she explains: "This Play had been sooner in Print, but for a Report about the Town (made by some either very Malitious or very Ignorant) that 'twas Thomaso alter'd; which made the Booksellers fear some trouble from the Proprietor of that Admirable Play." There was, no doubt, some justification for the report against which the author defends herself, for the main plan

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., pp.310, 311, 312, 313, 314.

[2] Summers, Works, I, pp.5-6.

[3] Nicoll and Summers incorrectly give the date July 4.

of the play, its execution, and many of the details are obviously copied from Thomas Killigrew's Thomaso; or, the Wanderer (1663-4). However, she makes little admission of her "borrowing." "I have stol'n some hints"; "I .... hang out the Sign of Angelica (the only Stol'n Object) to give Notice where a great part of the Wit dwelt"; "I will only say the Plot and Business (not to boast on't) is my own: as for the Words and Characters, I leave the Reader to judge and compare 'em with Thomaso."

Thomaso, written while Killigrew was in Madrid during the exile of Charles II, but never acted, is a long continuous play of two parts containing five acts each. From the entire play Mrs. Behn, by choosing what was best, rewriting the conversation in witty and vivacious dialogue, giving the characters life, vigor, individuality, and being, and adding some characters and circumstances of her own, produced in the first part of The Rover, a play that is good comedy. Four years later, in the second part, she was not so fortunate; the sequel was unsuccessful, perhaps, because in it she made use of what she had rejected in Thomaso the first time.[1]

The material of the play falls into the pattern of the conventional love chase with two sisters "over-reaching" the guardian, their brother Pedro. Hellena, the vivacious, resourceful, "wild cat" sister is intended for the veil, a fate which

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[1]The setting of Part I is Naples instead of Madrid, perhaps through an oversight on Mrs. Behn's part, perhaps through carelessness, at least in confirmation of the fact that the name of the setting meant little to either the Restoration playwrights or audiences.

does not at all please her. Before the day arrives for her vows, she is determined, against the orders of her brother, to try her hand at love. The carnival setting furnishes a screen behind which she carries on her search for a lover. Florinda, the other sister, is destined to be married either to the rich old Don Vincento, her father's choice, or to Antonio, the Vice Roy's son, her brother's choice. She loves the brave English cavalier, Belvile, who saved her from the lust of the soldiers during the "Siege of Pompelona." With a cousin Valeria, who is used to engage Frederick, the two sisters go disguised as gypsies into the street in search of Belvile, lately arrived in Naples, and a lover for Hellena. When the group of Englishmen is encountered, Hellena is at once attracted to Willmore, the Rover; Florinda contacts her lover; and Valeria finds Frederick worthy of her attention, while Blunt immediately falls into the hands of the scheming Lucetta.

Mrs. Behn does not divide the action of the play into one main plot with a subordinate action, nor does she use the two "camps" of characters as a division. The main plot is concerned, not with one, but with three actions of almost equal interest: the chase of Hellena after Willmore, Angelica's pursuit of Willmore, and the Florinda-Belvile affair run almost abreast throughout. In addition to these three actions, there are two minor plots: one which deals with the rivalry of Pedro and Antonio for Angelica, and another which treats the incident of Lucetta's robbing Blunt of his clothes and money and then turning him into

the street half-dressed.[1] The connections among the various plots are not too cohesive, for often the author has the reader jumping from one intrigue to the other in quick succession. Yet there are links, forged chiefly by the use of one or more characters in several of the actions. For example, Willmore is affiliated with almost every action concerning the Englishmen; he is involved with Don Pedro's family through Hellena, with the Angelica business through his attraction to her. Antonio is involved with Angelica and with Pedro through friendship and his promise to marry Florinda. The episode between Blunt and Lucetta is connected only by Blunt's being one of the cavaliers. We may conclude, from the evidence, that Mrs. Behn's purpose was not to create a unified plot but rather to employ devices to amuse, as she did with an ample stock of turns and counterturns, disguises, masquerades, tricks and complications of all sorts.

The opening scenes of the play are employed according to dramatic tradition: characters are introduced and some of the circumstances disclosed. In the first scene Hellena and Florinda are discussing their plights; Don Pedro enters and, in reminding each girl of his plans for her, establishes himself as the guardian. The next scene is used to introduce the Englishmen, to acquaint the audience or reader with the circumstance and degree of Belvile's love for Florinda, and to bring the two groups, the "Spanish" and English, together. Though the stage

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[1] The idea originates in Baccaccio, Second Day, Novel 5 but was used frequently on the stage. Killigrew used it as did Middleton in Blurt Master Constable. Summers, Works, I, p.5.

is set, the action is delayed while Angelica and circumstances concerning her are presented. The courtezan's picture is posted with a notice that she is to be sold for a thousand crowns a month. Her beauty is admired by the penniless Englishmen and fought over by Pedro and Antonio, who contend for first place with the famous beauty. After the fight, which is broken up by Belvile and Willmore, Pedro challenges Antonio for the morrow at the Molo, where he will revenge Florinda's honor.

Mrs. Behn here uses the customary means for preparing the audience for some business that occurs later in the play. Pedro makes the audience ready for the disguise trick which is used in the duelling scene in Act IV by suggesting that they appear at the appointed place "disguis'd that whosoever chance to get the better, he may escape unknown." It then becomes possible for Belvile to appear in Antonio's place unknown to Pedro. The audience knows that Pedro is making a mistake in offering the hand of Florinda to the supposed Antonio, but Pedro remains ignorant of the error until Willmore enters and calls, "'Tis he -- my dear Belvile." In natural consequence the favor is rejected and the lovers must devise another plan to cheat the brother.

The second scene of Act II is used to establish the relationship between Willmore and Angelica. Willmore has boldly pulled down the picture, is admitted to the house, declares his love and his inability to pay the price she requires. Overcome by her passion, she yields to him and from then on showers him with signs of her devotion which both attract and annoy the inconstant Rover. Their meetings thereafter become quarrels instead of love scenes. All of Acts III and IV are taken up with

the tricks and devices which carry the action forward, while Act V is full of other tricks which are brought in to achieve a successful conclusion.

Mrs. Behn has cleverly utilized disguise in a variety of situations. The carnival setting permits masks, visors, and all kinds of masqueradings, the use of which makes the "extravagances" committed by the characters more unconstrained. As Belvile aptly says, "Whatever Extravagances we commit in these Faces, our own may not be obliged to answer them."[1] Angelica wears a visor to spy upon Willmore's courtship with Hellena; Hellena in turn appears in the stock-in-trade male disguise, interrupts Angelica's pursuit of Willmore and infuriates her with the tale of the Rover's amours with the "gypsy," another of Hellena's disguises. The girls use a variety of costumes and masks to enable them to escape their brother. The flexibility of this comic device makes it applicable in numerous circumstances.

Mrs. Behn has also employed other traditional devices in the make-up of the play. One of them is the "aside," which she so adroitly employs in Act IV, ii. The purpose of the device is to guide the spectator through the contrivances of the scene. In this incident the "aside" becomes a gay bit of witty repartee between Hellena and Willmore when Hellena, in her male disguise, is fanning the flame of Angelica's jealousy. Another device which is a carry-over from traditional English drama is the use of couplets either for the purpose of indicating a break in the

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[1] Act II, i.

action or merely for inserting an occasional moral tag. Mrs. Behn's couplets which occur only four times during the play are obviously the "moral tag" variety.

Again in the true comic tradition, Mrs. Behn uses the final scene for rounding out the action. Disguises are removed; complications are cleared up; offenses are forgiven; and the proper lovers are united. Here we find the characters brought together in Blunt's apartments. Florinda, escaping from her brother, runs into an open house to evade detection and comes upon Blunt, just returned from the encounter with Lucetta, sitting half-clad and in no pleasant mood. Desiring revenge upon womankind for his affront, he greets Florinda, whom he does not know, with roughly insulting remarks. She somewhat mollifies him with the gift of a diamond ring. Frederick appears and suggests that they lock Florinda in another room because he knows the others, Belvile, Don Pedro, and Willmore, are coming to laugh at Blunt. Belvile recognizes Florinda's ring, is astounded at the treatment she has received and horrified at the possibility of Pedro's discovering her. The situation is saved by Valeria, who, having seen Florinda and Pedro enter the same door, sends Pedro away with the news that Florinda has disappeared. Before Pedro can return, the lovers, Florinda and Belvile, are united and, with Frederick and Valeria, depart to be wed. Willmore is then surprised by Angelica who, loading him with bitter reproaches for his infidelity, is about to shoot him when Antonio enters, disarms her and would shoot Willmore himself but Angelica stops him. Pedro returns to witness part of the scene, is angry with Antonio, and again uses Florinda's honor as an excuse for an

appointment. In his fury with Antonio he forgives Belvile and Florinda for their "over-reaching." All go out to give place to Hellena, who appears still in the boy's disguise and with her vivacious wit and good humor persuades Willmore that he can have her by marriage, incurring no promises of constancy by either. The others return; Pedro, the benevolent guardian, forgives Hellena with his blessings and brings about the happy conclusion in accord with the best traditions of comedy.

Florinda and Hellena are the traditional types of heroines. Florinda is the love-lorn maid who is continuously seeking and sighing for her lover. Hellena is the pert, lively, young lady, the match for the wild gallant Willmore. Hellena is not found in Mrs. Behn's source, and therefore I presume that she is original. She is the female counterpart of the handsome vigorous Willmore. In contrast to the profligate Rover, Belvile is the virtuous lover originated by Mrs. Behn to match the lovelorn heroine.

The Rover, doubtless, won its popularity not so much for the theme, which is quite commonplace, but for the dexterity with which the author has treated the material she found in Thomaso. It is one of the best examples of Mrs. Behn's ability to handle involved actions and to employ many of the characteristic devices of comedy; and it remains, I think, among the best Restoration comedies of the type.

The Rover, II

The second part of The Rover; or, the Banished Cavaliers has not been praised as highly as the first part, perhaps for good reason. The Prologue admits that the writing of the second part was prompted by the success of the first.

> Our Author too, as all new zealots do,
> Full of Conceit and Contradiction too,
> Cause the first Project took, is now so vain,
> T'attempt to play the old Game o'er again:

At the time of its presentation at the Duke's Theater in Dorset Garden in February or April, 1680[1] the play was well received, but its popularity was short lived.

The inferiority of the second part of The Rover is due, in part, to the material. Turning again to Thomaso as the source, Mrs. Behn could use only what she had rejected in her first judgment, the almost farcical elements of Killigrew's play.

Mrs. Behn, this time, adopts the original setting, Madrid. To that city she brings the English cavaliers minus Belvile, who,

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[1] There seems to be some uncertainty as to the date. Nicoll uses February or April, 1680; Harbage, February, 1680; Summers, 1681 and no month. However, in Nicoll's "List of Plays Performed Before Royalty" I find "80 April 4: at ye 2d part of ye Rover." See Summers, Works, I, p.112; Nicoll, op. cit., pp.353, 311; Alfred Harbage, op. cit., p.142.

we learn, is living happily with Florinda in France; she reinstates Beaumond, the English Ambassador's son, and other characters from the source. There are Shift and Hunt, Willmore's friends and officers; Harlequin, an Italian; Don Carlo, an old Grandee; an old Jew, the guardian of two monsters; the monsters themselves, a dwarf and a giant (female). Ariadne replaces Hellena, not too well; Lucia, Valeria; La Nuche, Angelica Beanca. Ned Blunt, the English country gentleman, and Fetherfool, the Squire, have more important roles than in first part, only because they bear the brunt of satire and much ridicule. Without Belvile, as mediator, Willmore gives way to his desire to make fools of his dull countrymen. Much of the play is taken up with the tricks he plays on them.

Act I, in good dramatic tradition, is used to introduce characters and situations. There is only one scene, but before it is ended most of the characters have appeared on the stage. First the reader is acquainted with some of the changes which have taken place since he left the Englishmen well-pleased and happy in Naples. No mention, however, is made of the time that has elapsed between the two plays. As Willmore begins his woman-hunt almost immediately, information about the vivacious Hellena is necessary. Willmore relates that the marriage lasted only a month, for in a fit of kindness Hellena went to sea with him and died in a storm, "and nothing remains with me but the sad Remembrance -- not so much as the least part of her thousand crowns." He dismisses the subject to talk of the "price of Pleasure." From Beaumond, just returned from France, we learn that both Belvile

and his lady are "in Health at St. Germains." Shift brings news that two monsters from Mexico, "Jews of vast fortune" have arrived to receive treatment from a famous Mountebank who is coming to Madrid. Blunt and Fetherfool decide to marry the "fortunes," but Willmore reveals his intention of disguising as the Mountebank to trick the Englishmen.[1] La Nuche appears and reveals that she loves the Rover but will not "bate a Ducat" of her price for all the pleasures of love. In passing, Ariadne catches sight of Willmore, falls in love with him and begins her pursuit. With the situation thus in order trick follows trick; complications arise; disguises, accidents, surprises, mistakes, arguments, fights, and elements of confusion occur and recur throughout the next acts and project into the final scene of the play. Only a part of the last scene is used in untangling the almost hopeless confusion of which the entire action consists.

The action of the play is not distinctly divided into plot and subplot, for the plots are varied and overlapping. Willmore is the connecting link, for he is in some way involved in most of the incidents. The main theme, however, is concerned with a variation of "over-reaching." Ariadne, the English ambassador's stepdaughter, and Beaumond, his nephew are contracted. Neither loves the other; both resent the arrangements

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[1]This incident probably had its inspiration in Rochester's "Dr. Alexander Bendo" exploit which is said to have taken place in the spring of 1676. For details see Vivian De Sola Pinto, Rochester, Portrait of a Restoration Poet, pp.104-110.

made by the parents and make other pursuits: Beaumond seeks the love of La Nuche while Ariadne tries to win Willmore. The remainder of the action is concerned with Willmore's pursuit of La Nuche, his Mountebank activities, and the trickery involving the Englishmen and the monsters.

Through his Mountebank disguise, Willmore, "a renowned Man of Arts and Sciences, a Don of Wonders," is able to execute a number of tricks. He collects the commission that Blunt and Fetherfool pay to be allowed to court the Monsters. He pretends that he can effect all the cures, changes and transformations that are asked of him: Petronella, the old courtezan offers herself to be rejuvenated; the Dwarf and Giantess are on hand to be transformed to normal size. As a diviner of "Fate and Fortune" he practically succeeds in tricking La Nuche into submission. He pretends to read her fortune in a ball. By telling her some things he really knows about her, the Mountebank is able to convince the fair lady that he speaks the truth. Prompted by her questions, he prophesies that she is powerless to resist the charms of the "wild, fickle, restless, faithless as the wind" Captain whom she loves. He taunts her with facts concerning both his own courtship of Ariadne and her mercenary interests in Beaumond. La Nuche becomes so confused that she is torn between her desire to submit herself to the Rover and her determination to sell herself only for "Interest." Willmore retires, leaves off his disguise, and appears almost immediately as the Captain to conquer the Beauty while she is willing. He is, as seems to be his usual luck with La Nuche, prevented. The appearance of Ariadne as a young man petitioning the love of the courtezan,

purposefully to hinder Willmore's following her, results in a contest between the youth and the Rover. Beaumond's entrance interrupts the proposed sword fight; his jealousy reveals to Willmore that he is also enamoured of La Nuche. His appearance has reminded the courtezan of her resolve; she and Willmore separate in a fury.

A great deal of confusion is caused on occasion by a mixing of the lovers, Ariadne, La Nuche, Willmore, and Beaumond, as each is trying to come upon his lover. The evening following the incident at the Mountebank's, Ariadne is expecting Willmore and has left the garden gate ajar. Beaumond meets Willmore by the garden and unable to identify each other in the dark, they start a brawl. La Nuche, who has followed the Rover, runs frightened into the garden. Both men, entering the garden separately, encounter the lady and take her for Ariadne. Willmore spies the real Ariadne and would lead her into another part of the garden. Before she follows him, she interrupts Beaumond who, in conversation with La Nuche, is swearing against marriage with a lady of quality. In the meantime Willmore has accosted Lucia, who comes screaming from fright. The noise brings Beaumond's pages and the confusion multiplies until all disperse in different directions.

The last scene consists of a similar medley. Following another quarrel with La Nuche, Willmore goes to keep an assignation with Ariadne. Beaumond has followed him and is waiting outside in a chair. When Ariadne appears, not having met Willmore in the darkness, she mistakes Beaumond for the Rover whose voice he has imitated, gets into the chair, and they depart.

Willmore reappears still looking for Ariadne. La Nuche, again in pursuit, pretends she is Ariadne and yields to the charming captain. Later, in the light of the Mountebank's lodgings, the Rover discovers his mistake and is pleased when the beautiful courtezan consents to live with him. Beaumond and Ariadne, finding themselves rejected, consider marriage a rather pleasing prospect.

The chief "mixer" of characters and incidents is Shift, whom Willmore has enlisted as his aid in carrying out the trick to be played on the foppish Blunt and Featherfool. The giantess and dwarf are in love with Shift and Hunt respectively, but as part of the trick allow themselves to be courted by the Englishmen, who are almost speechless with fear during the first meeting. Shift persuades Fetherfool to climb up on a ladder to salute the giantess who has fallen his lot, while Blunt is courting his "little diminutive Mistress," his "small Epitomy of Woman-kind" in delicate speeches. Fetherfool is treated to another difficulty in the person of a rival giant, Hunt in disguise. Before he learns that he is being "cozened" by his friends, he swallows the pearls of the necklace which he, upon Harlequin's insistence, steals from the sleeping giantess' neck. When he is ready to marry the monster, Shift snatches her from him in the dark.

Fetherfool is also made the victim of a situation which is almost stock device in comedy. Having been led on by Petronella, he awaits La Nuche at her house. Carlo arrives and makes his way into the chambers where he expects to surprise the courtezan. To his disappointment and anger, he finds Fetherfool with whom he comes to blows. Fetherfool in a fright escapes

through the window without his clothes and returns with Harlequin who brings the clothes to the lodgings.

In addition to the stock devices with which the comedy abounds, Mrs. Behn has several that are rather novel. In Act II, i, when the crowd has gathered to watch the Mountebank's show, Shift and Hunt decide to instigate the theft of Carlo's horse. Shift suggests:

> ... shoulder you upon one side of his great Saddle, I'll do the like on t'other; then heaving him gently up, Harlequin shall lead the Horse from between his Worship's Legs: All this in the crowd will not be perceiv'd, where all eyes are employ'd on the Mountebank.
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> [... Harlequin leads the horse forward, whilst Carlo is gazing and turning up his Mustachios; they hold him up a little while, then let him drop: he rises and stares about for his horse.]

In Act III, i Hunt, disguised as the giant (made by his standing on the shoulders of another man), desires to go through the door but finds he is too large. Willmore, as Mountebank, offers to have the door broken down, but Hunt replies that he can go in "at twice."

> [Hunt being all Doublet, leaps off from another Man who is all Breeches, and goes out; Breeches follows stalking.]

Genest finds this trick somewhat "contemptible" in a regular play, but says it "might produce a good effect in a Pantomime."[1]

It is also interesting to observe that Harlequin speaks in Italian, Act IV, iv. Nicoll notes that "Mrs. Behn apparently

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[1] Genest, op. cit., I, p.310.

introduced a real Italian harlequin," who probably spoke "extempore."[1]

The play, as I have tried to show, is full of laughter-provoking situations, and the complications of intrigue. Mrs. Behn's failure in this comedy is found, I think, not in the execution of the intrigue nor in the failure to produce laughter, but in the portrayal of rather dull characters, with, perhaps the exception of Willmore, and in her choice of material which borders a little too closely upon the farcical. The unified advancement of the action is broken into by too many different kinds of things: harlequin, pantomime, mountebank's activities, and others. The effect is of a series of disconnected incidents rather than of a well-developed plot progressing toward completion.

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p.240.

The Feign'd Curtezans

The Feign'd Curtezans; or, A Night's Intrigue, produced at the Duke's Theater, Dorset Garden, March 6, 1679, is the only one of Mrs. Behn's comedies that is said to be wholly original. As a comedy of intrigue, the kind of play that Mrs. Behn loved even after the species had given way to the comedy of manners and to farce, it is a ready example of the author at her best.

In the first production the play could have been only "well acted" as Downes remarks,[1] for indeed, the cast was a star one with Betterton, Leigh, Nokes, Underhill, Smith, Crosby, Gillo, Norris, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Currer, and Mrs. Lee; but for some unaccountable reason it did not attain the recognition accorded some other of her comedies. Nicoll observes, "... to me it seems a poor and dull performance. There are no characters worth speaking of and the plot is a sorry contrivance,"[2] but Langbaine asserts, "The play was well accepted and accounted one of the best she writ"[3] with which statement Genest agrees in saying, "This is

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[1]Downes, op. cit., I, p.37.

[2]Nicoll, op. cit., pp.211-212.

[3]Langbaine, op. cit., p.9.

a very good comedy and Mrs. Behn's best play next to the first part of the Rover."[1] Whatever the opinion of the critics may be, The Feign'd Curtezans continued to be played from time to time during the season and was revived at Lincoln's Inn Fields, August 8, 1716.[2]

The plot is not quite a "sorry contrivance" but is surely full of the complications of intrigue. Developing the action in the traditional pattern, Mrs. Behn uses Act I to introduce the main characters and key situations. First it is discovered that Laura-Lucretia, a lady of quality, plans to attract an English cavalier by having him think that she is La Silvianetta, the young Roman Curtezan. At the same time, Julio, to whom she is contracted, is following her without knowing who she is. Next we learn that two Englishmen have just arrived from Viterbo, where one of them, Sir Harry Fillamour, fell desperately in love with Marcella, a beautiful lady of quality. The other, Galliard, is in Rome seeking relaxation and the enjoyment of a beautiful courtezan named Silvianetta. Julio, a friend of Sir Harry and a native of Viterbo, has just arrived in Rome, after an absence of seven years, to be married to Laura-Lucretia, whom he has never seen. However, in order to continue his pursuit of "La Silvianetta," he is keeping his arrival a secret from his family. Next we find that Petro is acting the pimp for two fictitious courtezans, Euphemia and Silvianetta. In that role

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[1] Genest, op. cit., I, p.269.

[2] Ibid., p.270, and Summers, Works, I, p.304.

he teases and tricks Sir Signal Buffoon, an English fop, who is travelling in Italy, and his governor, Mr. Tickletext, a puritan divine.

The first scene of Act II is used to complete the introduction of characters and situations. From a conversation between Octavio, who is contracted to Marcella, and Morosini, her uncle, we learn that the young lady, with her sister Cornelia, has fled from Viterbo to Rome in search of Fillamour, whom she has learned to love. Octavio is determined to avenge the wrong done him by the "false" Marcella and the "hated Rival", Fillamour. As he and Morosini depart to continue their search for the elusive young ladies, Marcella and Cornelia, enter dressed like courtezans with the assumed names, Euphemia and Silvianetta. They have taken a house in an obscure street in order to evade Morosini, Octavio, and Julio, their brother, who is expected to arrive in Rome at any time, and at the same time to carry on their search.

As the play progresses the action becomes more involved with complications that arise from the courtezan disguises, from the two fictitious Silvianettas, from the buffoonery and tricks of Petro, and from the confusion of duelling, street brawls in the darkness, mistaken identities, and accidents of all kinds. Still other tricks, turns and counterturns are necessary in the last act to bring about conventional close. The disguises are removed, the offenders are forgiven, the lovers are united, and all is set to rights in the tradition of good comedy.

The treatment of the material in the main action is a variation of the ever popular "over-reaching" theme, carried out here by the sisters, Marcella and Cornelia, who have fled from

their uncle, Morosini, to escape on the one hand marriage with Octavio, and on the other the confinement of a convent. In their courtezan disguises which seemed neither to them nor to the audience of 1679 inconsistent with their rank of quality,[1] they make their appearance in the Gardens of the Villa Medici, where it was customary for gallants and ladies to stroll in the evening. The Cavaliers approach. Galliard is immediately attracted to Silvianetta (Cornelia) and begins his suit. The reluctant Fillamour is astonished by the likeness of "Euphemia" to Marcella and is too awed to make advances. Galliard urges Fillamour to lay aside his virtue and speak to the courtezan. The suit is interrupted by Octavio, who recognizes Fillamour, and a general medley ensues. Later Marcella, eager for a meeting with Fillamour and wanting to try his faithfulness, disguises herself as a boy and gives him a note, signed with her own name, in which she asks him to return to Viterbo. Galliard, however, holding him to his promise, drags him off to visit "Euphemia." While they are serenading the courtezans, Octavio, Julio, and their bravos engage the Englishmen in another brawl. When they do arrive for the appointment, Marcella, as the beautiful Euphemia, uses all the art of the courtezan to tempt Fillamour, who, in spite of the attraction he feels for the beauty who looks so

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[1] Nicoll, op. cit., p.14, note 3. "The habit of mask wearing seems to have come in shortly after the Restoration, and although abandoned by 'Civil Gentlewomen' by 1680, it was not surpressed entirely until the edict of Anne in 1704. It rapidly became the recognized mark of a prostitute, although even 'ladies of quality" such as Mrs. Behn's Feign'd Curtezans seem not to have minded being taken by their gentlemen friends as femmes d'amour."

much like Marcella, is able to resist and departs, still virtuous, to her secret joy. In the meantime, Galliard has been cheated of the enjoyment of "Silvianetta." After he encounters Tickletext in the bed where he expected to find a ravishing beauty, he is convinced that the courtezan is a cheat, an opinion which is augmented when she declares that she is a virtuous lady of quality who will give herself in marriage only. Galliard departs in a rage, only to have his opinion confirmed by Julio, who, having been led, mistaken for Galliard, into the apartment of Laura-Lucretia (who is, he thinks, the real Silvianetta), joyously relates his experience with the courtezan. When the explanations are made, however, Galliard forgives Cornelia, who accepts him with his promise of marriage.

One of the supporting plots is another variation of "over-reaching"; it is concerned with Laura-Lucretia, who contracted by Octavio to Julio, persists in her pursuit of Galliard. In assuming the name of Silvianetta and taking a house next to the one occupied by the other Silvianetta, she hopes that Galliard can be enticed, by mistake, into her apartment. At the same time she disguises herself as a count, partially to win Galliard's friendship and partially to prevent his courtship of Cornelia. Her efforts are, for the most part, wasted, for when the long awaited opportunity arises, it is Julio, not Galliard, whom she leads into her house. When the truth is learned, through the conventional explanation, and when the identities are disclosed, neither Laura nor Julio is displeased with the prospect of the contracted marriage. The link between this plot and the main one is the relationship of the characters. Marcella and Cornelia are

the sisters to Julio; Laura-Lucretia is the sister of Octavio; Julio is contracted to Laura-Lucretia while Octavio is contracted to Marcella. Galliard and Fillamour are friends of Julio and marry his sisters. The Laura-Lucretia-Julio contract is carried out, but Octavio gives in to Fillamour, who has the love of Marcella. Morosini is willing to forgive his errant nieces.

The other subplot which involves much of the amusing activity of the play is concerned with the "pimping" of Petro, the servant of Marcella and Cornelia. His principal victims are, as I have already suggested, Sir Signal Buffoon and his governor, Tickletext. Petro and Tickletext are good comic characters although at times they engage in actions that are almost farcical. Petro leads his dupes, together and separately, into very amusing situations. He pretends to each that Silvianetta will, for a price, receive him. He barbers them ridiculously; he overcomes them as a fencing master; he picks their pockets while teaching them Italian civilities and robs them on every occasion.

Tickletext, by his hyprocrisy, exposes himself to the tricks of Petro. In his attempt to hide his desire to visit the courtezan from Sir Signal, he becomes ludicrous. When Sir Signal catches him, he pretends to preach a bombastic sermon of reformation to the innocent lady (Cornelia). It is he whom Galliard finds in "Silvianetta's" bed, where he is expecting to discover the courtezan. Mrs. Behn is duplicating a scene from The Rover, Act IV, iv in which Carlo comes upon Fetherfool in the same circumstance, a situation which is almost stock comic device. Later upon leaving the premises, the unfortunate divine,

led by Petro, falls into a well. From this predicament he is rescued by Sir Signal, who, because it is dark, does not recognize his governor.

Sir Signal Buffoon, the foppish traveller, is equally as ludicrous. He is eager for an experience with an Italian courtezan and for other adventures which will make him more "foppish." He uses Italian phrases more often inappropriately than appropriately. Petro "victimizes" him too, taking his money under false pretenses, leading him to Silvianetta's lodgings, only to push him into a sooty chimney corner where he overhears her making love to Galliard. He is laughed at by the cavaliers and is generally in a confusion trying to avoid Tickletext, who is equally as eager to avoid his young charge.

Both of these characters, the fop traveller and the puritan divine, are made figures of satire and ridicule by Mrs. Behn. Fops of all kinds were commonly satirized in one way or another by most playwrights of the period; exaggerated foppish characteristics were always good comedy. The last decades of the century was not too late to find the Puritans used as material for satire; their bombast and hyprocrisy made good targets for the pens of both poets and playwrights, who were not reluctant to employ any form of satire that would be appreciated by the audience.

Throughout the play, in spite of its comic and farcical element, there is still a serious note running through the whole. Mrs. Behn uses Fillamour to emphasize the "wrongness" of marriage of convenience and of whoring. It is he and Marcella

who represent the virtuous couple, while Galliard is brought into the bonds of matrimony by the virtuous Cornelia; Laura-Lucretia and Julio are content with their contract only because they love each other. It is in accord with the best traditions of comedy that Mrs. Behn's couples do not marry without love.

Mrs. Behn has handled the plot well in spite of the complications of the intrigue. By never allowing either the situation or characters to get out of hand and through her wit and vivacity, she has produced a sparkling comedy which is one of her masterpieces.

The False Count

By September, 1682, Mrs. Behn had abandoned the Royal cause which she had ardently supported in The Roundheads, (December, 1681) and in The City Heiress (March, 1681/2). She announces her conversion in the Prologue to The False Count; or, A New Way to Play an Old Game, which was produced at the Duke's Theater in Dorset Garden, in September, 1682.

> Our Author as you'll find it writ in Story,
> Has hitherto been a most wicked Tory;
> But now to the joy of the Brethern be it spoken
> Our Sister's vain mistaken eyes are open:
> And wisely valuing her dear Interest now,
> All powerful Whigs, converted is to you.

The play itself affords no internal evidence of the political loyalties of the author, although she introduces some middle-class characters who might have drawn the applause of the Whigs in the audience. They are wealthy bourgeoisie whose fortunes have helped them attain social importance. The riches of old Francisco, a former leather seller, win for him a young wife of quality, Julia, the daughter of Baltazer; Antonio, a rich young merchant is honored with the friendship of Carlos, the governor of Cadiz; the class-conscious Isabella, Francisco's daughter, feels that her wealth should help her to marry a man of high quality.

With its scene in Cadiz The False Count identifies

itself with Mrs. Behn's comedies of Spanish intrigue. The plot development, however, does not follow the pattern which is followed in some of the other comedies; namely, The Dutch Lover, The Feign'd Curtezans, and The Rover I and II. The material of the plot is divided into two parts: one is concerned with the trickery employed by Carlos to win Julia, whom he loved and courted ardently and expensively before her marriage to the jealous old Francisco; the other deals with the hoax used by Carlos and Antonio in disguising Guiliom, the chimney sweep, as a count who courts and marries the haughty Isabella. Francisco is afflicted with a jealousy "humor" which subjects him to much anxiety and mental agony occasioned by the tricks of the young gallant who has every advantage including Julia's love. Isabella is ridiculous in her vain and proud belief in her social importance. The greater part of the plot is given over to the Carlos-Julia theme. The Isabella-Guiliom idea, which is subordinate, is not a separate theme but is cleverly woven into the development of the principal intrigue. The close relationship of the characters through family and friendship ties unifies the elements of the plot.

The material Mrs. Behn makes use of in her "false count" theme is found in Molière's Les Précieuses ridicules, produced in 1659. Summers contends that the borrowing is very direct and refers to Isabella as "a close copy of Cathos and Magdelon."[1] Wilcox, however, admits that though there are "too many like-

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[1] Summers, Works, III, p.97.

nesses ... for one to believe the similarity accidental," there is no close copying.

> Isabella is a social snob, not a precieuse. Guiliam is a gay chimney sweep who enjoys his efforts at impersonation and has no such belief in his own social prowess as made Mascarilla and Jodelet butts as well as tools of their master. Isabella is forced at the end to keep her husband and help him to be a false count. Molière's famous character suggests some of the outlines of Guiliam, but his development is reasonably independent.[1]

It is well to note that Molière's emphasis is on strong characterization, whereas Mrs. Behn's effect, in accord with comedy of intrigue, is more dependent upon trick, surprise, and action. Mrs. Behn was not the only playwright of the period who turned to Les Précieuses ridicules for material. Flecknoe had used the same idea in The Damoiselle à la Mode, unacted, 1667, as did Shadwell in Bury Fair (1689) seven years after Mrs. Behn's play.

Summers finds in the famous galley scene of Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin a hint for Mrs. Behn's feigned Turkish ship capturing the yacht of Carlos,[2] but Wilcox makes no mention of the similarity nor of the possibility of Molière as a source for the idea. The Turkish scene is highly improbable and not too carefully worked out, due, perhaps, to the haste in which the play was written.[3] In Act II, i, Carlos and his confidants plan

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[1]John Wilcox, The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy, p.150.

[2]Summers qualified the statement. "This, however, is not original with Molière, being entirely borrowed from Le Pédant Joué, Act II, iv, of Cyrano de Bergerac (1654)." Works, III, p.97.

[3]"Tis a slight Farce, five Days brought forth with ease." Epilogue. (The haste may also account for the brevity of the play.)

to capture Francisco and his party as they are going home from Cadiz. Apparently Mrs. Behn has forgotten that such a plan had been made, for at the end of the act Guiliom persuades the entire party to board his yacht "for an airing upon the sea." The yacht is almost immediately seized by the Turks, Carlos' servants in disguise. The women are carried to a country house belonging to Antonio. Francisco is made to believe that it is one of the Grand Turk's Seraglios. The Grand Turk (Carlos) receives his prisoners and choses Julia for his Sultana, much to the disgust of Isabella, who aspired that honor for herself. To deceive him Julia vows faithfulness to Francisco, who, to avoid the bow string, entreats her to comply with everything Carlos wishes. When Baltazer, Julia's father, and Sebastian, Antonio's father, appear and uncover the deceit, Francisco is so relieved that he willingly consents to divorce Julia, as the lovers had hoped he would.

The contrivance of the plot is in accord with a traditional pattern. Act I introduces the situation and the characters. Through a conversation between Carlos and Antonio we learn of Julia's marriage to Francisco; of Antonio's contract to Isabella, who scorns him because he lacks "birth" and "title"; of Antonio's love for Clara, Julia's sister; and of the plan to deceive Isabella with the "chimney sweep" count. In the second scene of the first act there are incidents revealing Francisco's jealousy, Julia's love for Carlos, and Isabella's excessive pride and vanity. Act II presents Guiliom ready to play his part; he calls on Francisco and pretends to fall in love with the

much impressed Isabella. Carlos and Antonio have successful rendezvous with Julia and Clara. Act III carries out the intrigue and admits the Turkish plot. Acts IV and V are concerned chiefly with the "Turkish" intrigue and finally with the traditional conclusion which brings together Carlos and Julia, Antonio and Clara, and reconciles Isabella to her false count, whom she really loves.

Julia and Carlos are the conventional Restoration lovers; Antonio and Clara represent the supporting "faithful" couple. Isabella and Guiliam, with Francisco, contribute most of the humor of the play; although it is the situations in which the characters find themselves which are more amusing than their dialogue. Guzman, Carlos' man, is the originator and contriver of much of the intrigue. Guiliom, the false count, becomes the butt of much of the satire heaped upon the stock-in-trade fop. When Antonio begs him to refine his manners, he replies,

> Manners! you shall pardon me for that; as if a Lord had not more privilege to be more saucy, more rude, impertinent, slovenly and foolish than the rest of his Neighbors or Mankind .... Your saucy Rudeness in a Grandee is Freedom; your Impertinence, Wit; your sloven, careless; and your Fool, good natur'd; at least they shall pass so in me, I'll warrent ye.[1]

Thoroughly enjoying his role, Guiliom plays it in such good fashion that he is willing to continue as a false count to please Isabella -- and to enjoy her wealth. Isabella typifies the socially ambitious of the middle class who aspire to title and

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[1] Act III, i.

position; in this role she is made the object of ridicule and satire. The play ends with a word of advice to those as ambitious as Isabella:

> Antonio:...
> You base-born Beauties, whose ill-manner'd Pride
> Th' industrious noble Citizens deride
> May you all meet with Isabella's doom.
> Guiliom:...
> And all such Husbands as the Count Guiliome.[1]

Many of the involving and confusing elements of the comedy of intrigue have been omitted from The False Count. Disguise, to be sure, is used extensively in the Turkish episode and in the scenes which depict the deceit practised by the false count. There is, however, no "cloak and sword" activity, no mistaken identities, no duels, no scenes of confusion in the darkness. The humor of the play arises from situations, not from conversational wit. The characterization is weak because Mrs. Behn was to evolve interesting situations instead of individualistic characters. The play is in Summers' estimation "an excellent rattling farce,"[2] in Genest's, a "laughable farce."[3] The Epilogue also refers to it as

> ... a slight Farce, five days brought forth with ease,
> So very foolish that it needs must please.

The False Count; or, A New Way to Play an Old Game may appropriately be designated as a "specimen of the intrigue play veering to farce."[4]

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[1] Act V, i.

[2] Works, III, p.98.

[3] Op. cit., I, p.357.

[4] Nicoll, op. cit., p.261.

As the Epilogue points out, the author was evidently endeavoring to please her audience, not to achieve artistic perfection. It would seem that she was somewhat successful, for Summers asserts that "it (The False Count) seems to have kept the stage at intervals for some twenty years."[1] Both he and Genest[2] mention a revival at Lincoln's Inn Fields, August 11, 1715.

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[1] Works, III, p.98.

[2] Ibid., and op. cit., p.357.

Chapter IV

POLITICAL COMEDIES

The Roundheads

In the 1680's when history was on the verge of repeating the events of the 1640's, the theater became a "mirror of the times," times which were full of plots and party venom. Summers gives an apt summary of the circumstances when the "sins of forty-one" were being revived with "additions and amendments" in eighty-one.[1]

> They were unsettled and hazardous times. The country was convulsed by judicial murders and horrors which followed in the train of the pseudo-Popish Plot engineered by the abominable Oates and his accomplices. King and Parliament were at hopeless variance. The air was charged with strife, internecine hatreds and unrest.[2]

Politics was again playing an important role in the life of the city. In such an atmosphere and in such conditions, it is logical that both poetry and drama should reflect the political

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[1] Sir Timothy Treat-All says in Act III, i, of The City Heiress that the city has been charged with "the sins of Forty-One reviv'd again in Eighty-One, with Additions and Amendments."

[2] Summers, Works, I, p.335.

picture. The stage had truly become the "scene of News, a furious Party's drum." Mrs. Behn was well to the fore with her production of The Roundheads; or, The Good Old Cause, which was presented at the Duke's Theater, Dorset Garden, in December, 1681. Mrs. Behn uses the ghost of John Hewson, returned from hell, to introduce her play which is, as I shall1 show later, a Restoration adaptation of John Tatham's The Rump; or, The Mirror of the Late Times, a play of political significance which was produced at the Private House, Dorset Garden, on the eve of the Restoration twenty years earlier. Dryden and Lee contributed a tragedy, The Duke of Guise, prepared for July, 1682, but banned until the following November[1] by the Whigs, who, in attempting to suppress its production, created quite a furore. Some other examples of well-received plays with political theme are: Crowne's The City Politics (January 1682/3), a bitter attack upon Shaftesbury; Southern's Loyal Brother, a satire on both Shaftesbury and the Duke of York; D'Urfey's Sir Barnaby Whigg (September, 1681) and The Royalist (January 1681/2), both violent attacks against the Whigs. Between the years 1680 and 1685 many of the plays which were not political in nature were introduced by a prologue or concluded with an epilogue fully expressive of the venom of party politics.

In The Roundheads Mrs. Behn brought to life the "Good Old Cause" as surely as she brought Hewson's Ghost from hell to recite the prologue. The plots, the strain between Charles and his people, the conflict between the Whigs and the Tories all

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[1]Nicoll, op. cit., p.360.

recalled what had preceded the Restoration. Mrs. Behn made a timely choice of material when she turned to Tatham's play and interspersed his clever political banter with love, intrigues, cavalier gallants, and a puritan divine whom she made the target of ridicule.

The Rump had been Tatham's contribution to the preparation of the people of London for a restoration of monarchy. It is a well-contrived reflection of the times with characters from history, the schemes and intrigues of the competitors for power, their instruments, the wives of "would-be rulers," all presented at the moment when the people were ready to express their joy occasioned by the prospect of their liberation from the Cromwellian tyranny. The months between the death of Oliver Cromwell, September 3, 1658, and the restoration of Charles II, May 25, 1660, were by no means uneventful. The friends of the Commonwealth, by their contention over the individual having the best right as successor to the Protectorate brought Richard Cromwell's term in that office to a close in April, 1659. The issue remained unsettled and there was further rivalry. Fleetwood, the son-in-law of Oliver Cromwell, and Lambert, one of Oliver's peers, a member of the upper House, and a major general of the army, were the chief contestants. Fleetwood had called together the Long Parliament (Rump) in May, 1658, and from the forty members who attended had formed a Council of state with exclusive executive power. Lambert was not willing to surrender his claims to the Protectorship and, accordingly, the following October was turned out of Parliament with other dissentients. With his troops he marched to Newcastle, but

there his soldiers, learning that General Fairfax had declared for a "Free Parliament," deserted their leader. They were garrisoned at York until they were joined with Monk's force in January before he marched into London. Lambert, meantime, had returned to London after the troops had abandoned him. There he was arrested by order of Parliament and in March committed to the Tower, from which he escaped only to be arrested again almost immediately. In 1662 he was convicted of high treason and banished to the island of Jersey, where he died some thirty years later.

Meanwhile Fleetwood had lost favor with both parties through his weakness and vacillating hyprocrisy. His name was omitted from the general pardon, and it was with difficulty that he escaped with his life.

Tatham's play, with only a few liberties taken for dramatic purposes, adheres very closely to the historical facts; but Mrs. Behn, in accord with Elizabethan convention and with poetic license, departs considerably from the historical in her comedy, far more amusing than The Rump, which was written, however, for quite a different purpose than mere entertainment.

To Tatham's cast Mrs. Behn has added four fictitious characters: two Royalists, Loveless and Freeman; Ananias Gogle, a Lay Elder; and Lady Desbro, a friend to Lady Lambert. Besides serving as a touch of Royalist propaganda, Loveless and Freeman, with Lady Lambert and Lady Desbro, furnish the comedy with the love element, typically Restoration in tone and execution. Ananias Gogle is made the object of satire upon the canting hypocritical puritan divine; but in Mrs. Behn's hand he becomes

not only a type character, but an individual alive and acute in his own capacity, a good comic character.

Mrs. Behn has also introduced some scenes and situations of her own which add new life and humor to the original. Lady Lambert, who in The Rump is a rather stiff, wooden character, is the central figure in several of the best scenes and is depicted as the witty, vivacious heroine of Restoration comedy. Because she is very ambitious for herself and her husband, she dreams of the appointment of her husband to the position of King or Protector. She discounts in advance the actuality and insists that she be called "Highness." She is attracted to the charming Cavalier, Loveless, and falls in love with him. Loveless at first cannot bear the idea of loving one of the hated "Party," but is soon won over by the love he has for her person. When Lambert returns unexpectedly from a committee meeting to find his wife and Lady Desbro with the two "Heroicks," Lady Lambert saves the situation by pretending that they have come with petitions and dismisses them at once with blunt refusals. In Act IV Mrs. Behn uses Lady Lambert in the execution of a bit of clever stage craft. Loveless has been brought to her chamber at night; they are discovered on a couch. On a table behind the couch the Scepter and Crown are richly set out and adorned. When Lady Lambert uncovers them, Loveless is awed and at the same time astonished that she should be so daringly sacrilegious and exclaims,

> 'Tis Sacrilege to dally where it is;
> A rude, a saucy Treason to approach it
> With an unbended knee: for Heaven's sake, Madam,
> Let us not profane in our Delights,
> Either withdraw, or hide that glorious Object.

She attempts to place the crown upon his head, for she would give herself to him as a queen. He again protests.

> Forbear, do not play with holy things;
> Let us retire, and move as mortals should,
> Not imitate the Gods, and spoil our Joys.

The passion of both is diverted by the argument that ensues. Upon the heels of this scene, Mrs. Behn presents another. Into the chamber bursts the servant to announce the approach of the drunken committee. Loveless is quickly hidden under the coverlet of the couch; Lady Lambert sits upon his feet seemingly at her devotions. When Lambert sits down beside her, he rolls off as Loveless slips to the floor. The lights fall and are extinguished as the men in drunken terror cry, "A Plot! A Plot!" Lady Lambert convinces her husband that he is mistaken and that the whole situation is a drunken illusion.

The conventional virtuous couple is portrayed in Freeman and Lady Desbro, who are mutually in love. Lady Desbro has promised to marry her Cavalier if her husband should die, an event of which she is very desirous and which takes place as is revealed in the last act. On an occasion when the two are together, Desbro enters unexpectedly with the news of Monk's return from Scotland. Frightened and puffing between sentences, the old man prefers the comfort of his bed to the solace of his prayers. Freeman has been hidden behind the curtain of the bed but escapes, before he is caught, behind the cloak of Ananias Gogle, the hypocritical elder, who has brought him to Lady Desbro. Ananias has previously made himself obnoxious to Lady Desbro by entering her chamber and making sneering advances upon her

person. With threats to expose his corruption, she persuades him to have Freeman brought to her for an hour from prison where he had been thrown by the Committee for speaking in defense of the Royalists when he presented a petition. Ananias has complied with her request, for he has no objection to giving or receiving bribes. "For all degrees of Vice, you must grant," says Lady Desbro, "There is no Rogue like your Geneva Saint."

In Act IV, iii, perhaps as a satiric fling at the council, Mrs. Behn presents a scene of the Committee meeting. Lambert, Fleetwood, Desbro, Hewson, Duckingfield, Wariston, and Corbit, attended by Ladies Lambert and Fleetwood are discovered half drunk. The ladies are called away, Lady Lambert by the arrival of Loveless and Lady Fleetwood to her "Devotions." The men continue with their "health-drinking" which Fleetwood remarks, "savoureth of monarchy." The meeting ends with all of them singing, dancing, and flinging cushions at each other until they exeunt dancing.[1]

In Act V, ii, Mrs. Behn has invented the female counterpart of the Committee, a council of "ladies" met to hear the grievances of women. Their meeting is the occasion of much quibbling between Lady Lambert and Cromwell's widow. A few petitions are presented including one from Loveless, who, accord-

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[1] The cushion flinging is later referred to by Lady Lambert as their "Olivarian Frolicks." The same custom is mentioned by Lacy in The Old Troop; but it cannot be said to be solely a puritan or an Oliverian diversion because Pepys speaks of the young men going away to "flinging cushions." February 25, 1666, Pepys' Diary, (Wheatley ed.), V, p.234.

ing to an agreement between him and Lady Lambert, is attending the meeting disguised as a woman. When the activity is at its climax and Lady Lambert is asserting full power, a messenger appears with the news that Lambert's army has deserted and the general has been confined to the Tower. Lady Lambert almost collapses, but Loveless is there to support her. Wariston brings word that the Committee has been dissolved and Monk's army has taken over the city. The mob gathers to take revenge upon the republicans and to celebrate the return of the Royal forces. Lady Lambert and Lady Desbro disguised as pages escape from the mob with Loveless and Freeman.

The construction of Mrs. Behn's plot is well managed. As I have noted above, the Prologue is "spoken by the Ghost of Hewson ascending from Hell dress'd as a Cobler." He reminds the audience that he has been

> Rous'd by strange Scandal from th' eternal Flame
> With noise of Plots, of wonderous Birth and Name,
> Whilst the sly Jesuit robs us of our Fame.

He further opines that the plotting villanies and rogueries of the eighties cannot equal those carried on in forty-one. The first act opens, as Tatham's does, with the dialogue of two soldiers, a corporal, a Joyner, and a Felt-maker arguing the merits of Fleetwood and Lambert, the prospective Protectors. The corporal is the "go between" of Lady Desbro and Freeman. Freeman and Loveless discuss the merits of loving a lady of the Commonwealth. Loveless is averse to such a courtship until he sees Lady Lambert and falls in love with her. The Committee itself is introduced by means of an informal gathering at Lambert's home; and the reader gains insight into the tactics both Lambert and

Fleetwood are using to get control of the government. Each conspires with Wariston, Chairman of the Committee of Safety; Lambert pretends indifference while Fleetwood employs "underhand" methods. The body of the play is concerned with the activities of the Committee, the schemes of Lady Lambert, the love element, and the progress of the story. The last act is devoted to the climactic change in the government. The mob, with soldiers turned Royalist, converts Ananias through fear; the Woman's Council is interrupted by the news of Lambert's fate. Lady Lambert and Lady Desbro, whose husband died of fright, escape from the revengeful mob with the aid of the Cavaliers. The parliamentarians attempt to escape disguised as pedlars but are detected. Wariston, Gogle, and Hewson are maltreated. The final scene is a demonstration of the happiness of the people; they gather in the streets, roast the "Rump," and drink to the health of the Monarchy.

The play must have been very well received by the audience of 1681, who could recognize a parallel between the political situation of forty-one and of their own day. There is throughout an application that Mrs. Behn's audience would have made. The drunken council, for example, would have been taken to apply to Shaftesbury and his gang; Ananias, to the True-blue Presbyterian political divine; the cry, "A Plot! A Plot!", to Oates' Popish Plot; the contention of Fleetwood and Lambert for the Protectorship to Monmouth's effort to obtain the crown; and other minor applications which may not be as evident to us as they were to the seventeenth century theater-goers. Mrs. Behn, with her

usual cleverness, probably chose to emphasize what would go well with her audience. She clothed the material of Tatham's play in the garb of comedy and succeeded in making it very amusing.

The City Heiress

Mrs. Behn has filled her second political comedy so full of confusion, complication, and love intrigue that it is difficult in spots to remember that The City Heiress; or, Sir Timothy Treat-All is, as she terms it in the Dedicatory Epistle, "in every part true Tory! Loyal all-over!" Presented at the Duke's House, Dorset Garden in March 1681/2, it is designated by Downes as "well acted"[1] with an excellent cast including Betterton, Nokes, Leigh, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Corror, and Mrs. Leigh in the main roles. The author herself mentions, again in the Dedicatory Epistle, that "it has the luck to be well received in the Town." Summers[2] and Genest[3] mention a revival at the Haymarket, July 10, 1707.

The political angle of the story provides the main interest of the plot. Sir Timothy Treat-All, the "one Knave," a Whig among Tories, is here made, as Mrs. Behn says any Whig should be,[4] the "business and sport of comedy" with Whiggism

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[1] Op. cit., p.37.

[2] Works, II, p.198.

[3] Op. cit., I, p.317.

[4] "Dedicatory Epistle," Summers, Works, II, p.200.

"a Jest where'er 'tis met with." Sir Timothy is described in the Dramatic Personae as "an old seditious Knight, that keeps open house for Commonwealthsmen and true blue Protestants." Act III, which involves much of the intrigue and confusion of the play, is devoted to one of his open-house evenings. Sir Timothy, who does not habitually imbibe his own wine nor attend his own parties is forced by his Tory friends, Sir Anthony and Sir Charles Meriwell, who are in their cups, to drink to the "King's health and confusion of his enemies." Tom Wilding, Sir Timothy's discarded nephew, appears disguised as a Polish ambassador come to offer the crown of Poland and great honors to his uncle -- a bit of satire against Lord Shaftesbury.[1] The widow Galliard appears to watch Tom; Charlot, the city heiress, comes for the same purpose disguised as a lass from the North; and Diana, Tom's mistress, is there disguised as the city heiress to trick Sir Timothy. Tom is in a position which calls for a great deal of cleverness, and Mrs. Behn maneuvers him with just enough dexterity to prevent his becoming too entangled.

Whenever Sir Timothy appears in the play he is made ridiculous; through him as the object of satire, the author gives vent to her scorn of the Whigs. He is, however, not the only object of the satire directed against his party. There are various satirical references to the Ignoramus Juries and Whiggish customs, social, political, and religious. In Act IV, ii,

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[1]He was made the object of much bitter satire in many plays of the period: Payne's The Siege of Constantinople, Southern's Loyal Brother, Crowne's City Politics, and others.

Sir Charles says, "Damn the City," and Sir Anthony adds, "All the Whigs, Charles, all the Whigs."

For the most part the material of The City Heiress is the invention of the author. She has, however, used two sources for rather minor parts. Sir Anthony Meriwill and Sir Charles, his nephew, are found in the persons of Durazzo and Caldoro in Massinger's The Guardian, where their relationship and treatment is much the same as that employed by Mrs. Behn.[1] Sir Anthony is very desirous of seeing his nephew become a wild young gallant but discovers that in his approach to Lady Galliard he is dull and fawning. Determined to help Charles win the lady whom he loves, Sir Anthony accompanies his nephew to the widow's apartment, where, in spite of his uncle's coaching and prompting, Charles is too much in love to be forward and full of wit. Lady Galliard is disgusted with the whining youth and does not hide her indifference; although she would marry him if he would leave off his fawning. That same evening at Sir Timothy's Sir Anthony fills his dull nephew with drink so that he becomes witty and eager in his conversation with Lady Galliard. Later in the night Sir Anthony again accompanies his nephew to the lady's apartment and persuades him to "put his addresses with vigor." Left alone with the widow, Charles begins undressing himself and with his threats to complete the process extorts from her a promise of marriage, and thereby pleases his uncle greatly.

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[1] Genest, op. cit., I, p.318.

Middleton's A Mad World, My Masters is the source for the robbery which is staged in Act V, i. In itself the scene is very amusing and might easily constitute an entire act, but Mrs. Behn has made it only a minor part of the many complications and the vast amount of confusion that make up the fifth act. Tom, having been refused money by his uncle and having been told to gain a livelihood by his wits, plans to make his uncle the victim. Assisted by his friend Dreswell, he succeeds in tricking Sir Timothy into marrying the harlot, Diana (Tom's mistress). Disguised as the city heiress, whom Tom pretends to have just married, Diana is admitted to Sir Timothy's house. Determined to outwit his nephew, Sir Timothy offers marriage to Diana. Having fallen into the trap by his own "wit," the old man is disgusted to find himself married to his nephew's discarded mistress. Tom plans the robbery because he must have money and because Charlot, the real city heiress whom he wants to marry, demands, before she will accept him, the papers which prove him the heir of Sir Timothy. Having already established himself in his uncle's house as the Polish ambassador, Tom disguises himself as a Tory burglar; and in the night he and his friends bind Sir Timothy and his entire household and carry away his gold and the papers which Tom needs. When the theft is complete, Tom returns to his chamber where Sir Timothy, full of apologies, finds him bound and gagged. Upon his release he hurries away to assure Charlot that the papers are in his hand.

Tom Wilding is the profligate, witty young gallant of Restoration comedy. He is wild, extravagant, and debauched, full

of vices which his uncle blames on "Toryism." Before he became a Tory, rages the uncle, he was a "sober, civil youth, and had some religion in him." But through association with Sir Charles and young Dreswell, who are able to "debauche, destroy, and confound all the imitating Fops in Town," Tom has become as wicked as any of the Tories in whoring, drinking, gaming, and indulging in all kinds of "sinful" extravagances. It is the wickedness of his nephew that prompts Sir Timothy's threats to marry again and produce an heir of his own; and it is the miserly perverseness of the uncle that incites Tom to have revenge upon him, a resolution that is made stronger when Tom learns that his uncle is planning to marry Lady Galliard. Lady Galliard is an old "flame" of Tom's, one whom he still desires. Although she really loves the disreputable young gallant, she is reluctant to have him know it or to make any concessions to him. She repulses his advances and is determined to marry either Sir Timothy or Sir Charles. She is the witty, vivacious heroine who should, according to best comic tradition, marry the wild gallant, but Mrs. Behn does not allow the match. Instead, Lady Galliard weds the dull whining Sir Charles, and Tom gets the love-lorn heroine, Charlot, the city heiress.

Although the plot of The City Heiress consists of three actions, there is no distinct line of demarcation. The close relationship of the characters is partially responsible, but the appearance of the same character in more than one of the actions is mainly accountable for the merging of the actions. For example, Wilding is chiefly concerned in the action which is

made up of trickery against the uncle; he is at the same time involved in the Lady Galliard-Sir Charles affair, as well as the little intrigue of his own involving Charlot, whom he intends to marry. The main action of the comedy deals with Sir Timothy and his nephew's relationship in a variant of "over-reaching."

The attraction of the play to the audience was, no doubt, its political appeal. Though Mrs. Behn has employed many of the stock devices of comedy -- disguises, trickery, songs, and dances -- the audience of 1681/2 was more interested in the political satire than in the dramatic tricks of the author. The purpose of the play is expressed in the last lines of Sir Charles who speaks at the end of the play:

> Let all things in their own due Order move,
> Let Caesar be the Kingdom's Care and Love;
> Let the hot-headed Mutineers petition,
> And meddle in the Rights of just Succession:
> But may all honest Hearts as one agree
> To bless the King, and Royal Albany.

Chapter V

SERIOUS COMEDIES

The Town Fop

The Town Fop; or, Sir Timothy Tawdrey, Mrs. Behn's comedy which was produced at the Duke's Theater, Dorset Garden, in September, 1676, is a sentimental treatment of the problem of forced marriage. It is not the choice of the subject, but the manner of dealing with it that is unusual. In Restoration comedy compulsory marriage was a recurrent theme, but it was made ridiculous through the representation of foolish parents or guardians who were "over-reached" and tricked by the rebellious lovers. Mrs. Behn, however, under Elizabethan influence, attacks the problem from a different angle; she calls forth the pity of the audience for the victims of the unreasonable and immoral custom. We cannot determine whether the Restoration audience welcomed Mrs. Behn's play with sympathetic understanding, for there is no record of the performance to bear witness ot its success or failure; but it is reasonable, I think, to assume that such a play was not well received by the fun loving courtiers who attended the theater in 1676. At any rate Mrs. Behn, who ever

sought to please the audience, did not write any other sentimental comedy.

The material of The Town Fop is found in an Elizabethan play, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage by George Wilkins, who presents a tragi-comic version of the results of compulsory marriage. Having made solemn vows to Clare, William Scarborough is forced into marriage with Catherine. The news of the marriage leads Clare to kill herself; in turn the news of Clare's death drives Scarborough to violent hatred for his wife and later for the children who are born to them. He indulges in riotous dissipation, spends the fortunes of his family, and threatens murder when the faithful old butler tries to show him what his wickedness has done to Catherine and the children. Finally the parson who performed the marriage vows convinces Scarborough of the cruelty of his conduct and brings him to repent. The happy ending is brought about by his timely inheritance of an estate and by a reconciliation with Catherine amid tears of joy.

Mrs. Behn's comedy follows the general trend of Wilkins's plot but is relieved of the tragedy and much of the pathos. The Restoration element of intrigue is introduced and the comic material is amplified, but much of the sentimental element is retained. The hero, Bellmour, and Celinda have made solemn vows of faithfulness without the consent of Bellmour's uncle, Lord Plotwell. When he is ordered to marry Diana, the niece and only heir of Lord Plotwell, Bellmour, weeping, protests, "I have given my Heart and Faith, And my second Marriage is Adultery." The tears and pleadings are ignored, and the marriage is made. At the wedding feast Bellmour receives a note from Celinda:

> I have took in the poison which you sent in
> those fatal words, 'Forgive me, my Celinda, I am
> married,' -- 'twas thus you said, -- and I have
> only life to return, Forgive me, my sweet
> Bellmour, I am dead.[1]

Believing the statement to be true, Bellmour, on the wedding night deserts Diana, who, angry that her love has been spurned, in turn runs off with a strange youth, -- Celinda disguised as a page.

From Diana Celinda learns that Bellmour has been faithful to her, but it is too late to save him from despair and his resolve to abandon his virtuous life for one of wicked debauchery. He accompanies the foppish Sir Timothy Tawdrey to a brothel where they spend the night in bawdy reveling. Loathing himself and what he is doing, Bellmour cries:

> So -- now I'm like myself, profanely wicked.
> . . . . . .
> -- I will not die -- that Peace my Sins deserve not.
> I'll live and let my Tyrant Uncle see
> The sad effects of Perjury, and forc'd marriage.
> -- Surely the Pow'rs above envy'd my Bliss;
> Marrying Celinda, I had been an Angel,
> So truly blest, and good. [Weeps.][2]

When his brother Charles comes to request his own and his sister's part of the fortune due them the day after the wedding, Bellmour turns upon him and wounds him. When Charles asks the reason for his madness, his brother exclaims:

> My Uncle's Politicks, Hell take him for 't,
> Has ruin'd, thou and my Sister too,
> By marrying me to a fair hated Maid,
> When I had plighted all my Faith before.[3]

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[1]Act III, i.

[2]Act IV, iii.

[3]Act IV, iii.

Finally in a moment of madness, Bellmour, seeking his "wife" (Celinda) whom he thinks dead, pushes past Fainlove into the house where he encounters Diana, whom he does not recognize. He falls on his knees before her and begs forgiveness addressing her as "wife." At first Celinda, who overhears, is distressed but presently realizes the situation and makes herself known. Bellmour confesses that he has known no happiness since he broke his vows to Celinda and ardently renews them. Diana, who has fallen in love with another man, Celinda's brother Fainlove disguised as a soldier, is only too glad to have her marriage annulled. Lord Plotwell regrets his error in forcing a marriage where there is no mutual love. Friendlove has Diana; Bellmour has Celinda, and the traditional comic conclusion is attained.

Sir Timothy Tawdrey, the fop knight, brings into the comedy much of the spirit of the Restoration. He whores, gambles, and "sins to excess"; he is a cowardly braggart who fears the sword; he aspires to a marriage of convenience which will bring him luxuries and support his mistress. In his vulgarities he is the counterpart of the virtuous Bellmour and is, on every hand, contrasted with the noble hero. In the first act both are seeking the hand of Celinda. Sir Timothy, challenged to a duel by the determined Bellmour, fails to appear at the appointed place. In the bawdy house scene Sir Timothy's familiarity with and enjoyment of such debauchery is in direct contrast with Bellmour's reluctance and his distaste for the wickedness in which he forces himself to participate. Instead of fighting in the open, Sir Timothy determines to have revenge upon Bellmour by debauching his sister Phillis. However, he does not succeed;

his hangers-on, Sharp and Sham, cheat him into a real marriage. Quite in character his final words are to his mistress:

> thou'lt have me all to thyself within this Day or two:
> Since marriage but a larger Lecince is
> For every Fop of Mode to keep a Miss.[1]

Another part of the action is concerned with Friendlove, Celinda's brother, who is in love with Diana. Having given his promise to help Bellmour marry Celinda, Friendlove begs Bellmour to intercede with Diana on his behalf. The news of Bellmour's marriage to Diana arouses Friendlove's anger against his friend both on his own account and his sister's. Disguised, Friendlove appears at the wedding feast and challenges Bellmour, whose life Celinda, in her page's disguise, saves. Because he and Sir Timothy are wearing identical costumes, the cowardly knight is mistaken for Friendlove and is soundly kicked and beaten by Charles when he refuses to fight. Disguised as a soldier, Friendlove is able to win Diana's love with the condition that he kill Bellmour, who refuses to fight when they meet but pushes into the house where he finds Celinda. There explanations, reconciliations, and the happy ending take place.

In true Restoration vein, Mrs. Behn depicts a well drawn character of her own invention in Betty Flauntit, Sir Timothy's mistress. A vivacious, witty strumpet, Betty is a good match for the deceitful Sir Timothy. The scenes between the two are full of give-and-take dialogue of considerable wit and humor.

Mrs. Behn has retained some Elizabethan conventions and

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[1] Act V, iv.

much of the traditional atmosphere in her adaptation of Wilkins's play. Bernbaum finds in The Town Fop the one exception to the rule "that the influence of Elizabethan sentimental plays upon the Restoration was so faint as to be insignificant."[1] In addition to the sentiment there is a sympathetic portrayal of the characters and the idealization of love. Each of the acts, except Act IV, and several of the scenes close with couplets; there are two pastoral lyrics, one in Act IV, i, the other in Act I, ii.

The construction of the plot follows a conventional pattern. The first two acts are used to introduce the characters and situations which are important to the action. The remaining acts are concerned with the distresses which result from the unfortunate marriage and with the Sir Timothy-Betty Flauntit business. The last two scenes of Act V are devoted to removing disguises, dispelling misunderstandings, forgiving wrong-doers, and uniting happy lovers.

Mrs. Behn has preserved the unity of the play by allowing the forced marriage and its results to take precedence in the reader's interest over the other details. She has presented a somewhat realistic comedy of contemporary town life and has allowed the serious element to overshadow the little wit and humor that have been admitted. Bernbaum says, "had Mrs. Behn continued in this direction, or pointed the way to others, Restoration dramatists might have arrived at modern sentimental

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[1] Ernest Bernbaum, op. cit., p.52.

comedy."[1] And our author might have made for herself an immortal place in dramatic history. On the other hand, with the Restoration audience "unready" for sentimentalism, she might not have been successful in earning her bread by the pen -- her main purpose, as she herself professed, in writing.

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[1] Bernbaum, op. cit., p.52.

Sir Patient Fancy

Sir Patient Fancy in its original production at the Duke's Theater, Dorset Garden on January 17, 1677/8 brought down on Mrs. Behn such disapproval and condemnation from a certain group of critics that she felt called upon to print the play as soon as possible:

> I printed this play with all the impatient haste one ought to do, who would be vindicated from the most unjust and silly aspersion, Woman could invent to cast upon Woman; and which only my being a woman has procured me; That it was Baudy.

Evidently she had anticipated such condemnation, for the Epilogue ("Spoken by Mrs. Gwin") is a witty defense of the woman writers. The opening lines are indicative of her stand:

> I here and there o'erheard a coxcomb cry,
> Ah, Rot it -- 'tis a Woman's comedy
> One, who because she lately chanc'd to please us
> With her damn'd Stuff, will never cease to tease us.
> What has poor Woman done, that she must be
> Debar'd from Sense, and sacred Poetry?

The last line might have been a challenge to the decriers of a "Poet Joan":

> pray tell me then
> Why Women should not write as well as Men ?

In the capacity of the first woman "forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to own it," Mrs. Behn was struggling to make her way in a man's world. Somewhat on the defensive, she begged only for equal opportunity with her male contemporaries and a fair consi-

deration of her work which, as a man's (she thought), would have been judged admirable.

In spite of the adverse criticism, the play was well-received and remained in stock until the death of James Nokes and Anthony Leigh, the famous comedians, who aptly portrayed the roles of Sir Credulous Easy and Sir Patient Fancy,[1] when it completely dropped out of the repertory of the theater.

The question of the sources from which Mrs. Behn gathered the material that she converted into an extremely amusing and well-executed comedy of intrigue, wholly "Restoration" in its final aspect, has been made the subject of much conjecture and discussion. Summers agrees with the critics of Mrs. Behn's day who cried that Sir Patient Fancy "was made out of at least Four French plays." Sir Patient he held to be Argan of Molière's Le Malade Imaginaire, from which the scene of Sir Patient's death and the doctors' lingo are borrowed. The scene of medical consultation he finds to be stolen from L'amour Médicin. Sir Credulous is the English Monsieur de Pourceaugnac from Molière's comedy of that name, while Lady Knowell is a mixture of Philaminte and Belise from Les Femmes Savantes.[2]

Wilcox, on the other hand, finds in Sir Patient Fancy little more than what Mrs. Behn terms "a mere hint from the Malad

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[1] Summers, Works, IV, p.6. Summers compares its fate with that of D'Urfey's The Fond Husband and Crowne's City Politics which "lived only by the extraordinary performance of Nokes and Leigh." See Colley Cibber, Apology, (Everyman ed.), p.82.

[2] Works, IV, pp. 4-5.

Imagenere." The difference between the two, he maintains, is that Molière's play is a "great satire on the typical hypochondriac," while Mrs. Behn's is an "English farce of gay cuckoldry and amorous intrigue"; although they have the same common framework.[1] He discredits the direct parallels made by Summers:

> Sir Patient is not Argan; he is a testy, rich, cuckolded alderman with a 'humor' of being ill; his illness is a device of the author to produce surprise turns in the farcical plot. Beline fools Argan for his money, for which she married him, Lady Fancy married Sir Patient in order to finance her amour with her gallant.... Instead of a French blockhead like Thomas Diafoirus, Isabella's unwelcome suitor,[2] Sir Credulous Easy, is a British type, the rural knight whom the others know how to gull.[3]

It is a type so common in English plays that it is not possible to trace his origin to any specific source.

> Into the plot Mrs. Behn has put another character, Lady Knowell, ... an affected and amorous widow, who is amusing in her contempt for other than learned tongues and polysyllabic expression. She might have been recalled from Bélise, of Les Femmes savantes, but the imitation is very slight. A medical consultation is also vaguely similar to a consultation in L'amour médicin. Both of these are probably but not certain borrowings.[4]

There can be, I think, little doubt that Mrs. Behn did borrow some of her ideas from French sources as did many other dramatists

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[1]John Wilcox, The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy, p.147.

[2]Wilcox is in error here. Sir Credulous is the unwelcome suitor of Lucretia, Lady Knowell's daughter. Isabella's suitor is Wittmore, Lady Fancy's gallant, who assumes the name of Fainlove and the character of a country knight and pays court to Isabella in order to have easy access to his Lady Fancy.

[3]Wilcox, op. cit., p.147.

[4]Ibid., p.149.

of the Restoration and the eighteenth century, but the importance of such borrowing can be over-emphasized. Wilcox has, I believe, taken the rational point of view.

The principal action of the play is constructed on the framework borrowed from Le Malade Imaginaire. Sir Patient to the disgust of his family and friends, has for years imagined himself ill and has subjected himself to the treatment of numerous doctors. He is married to a deceitful young wife, Lady Fancy, who pretends to love him but uses his money to support her gallant, Wittmore. Sir Patient contracts his daughter Isabella to Fainlove, who is Wittmore posing as a country knight in accord with Lady Fancy's suggestion. Lady Fancy uses the hoax to dispose Isabella to her father's disfavor and to conceal her own unfaithfulness. When Sir Patient, disgusted with his intrusive neighbors, wants to leave town, his wife, so that she will not have to leave her lover, convinces her husband that he is too ill to arise from his bed. After the ridiculous medical consultation, Leander, Sir Patient's nephew, who has learned of Lady Fancy's deceit, persuades his uncle to test her love by pretending to die. The intrigue with Wittmore is discovered; Lady Fancy only laughs at her husband's divorce threats because she has cleverly obtained possession of £ 8,000, enough to support herself and Wittmore. Sir Patient is cured of his illness and resolves to turn spark and lead a merry life.

The other part of the plot deals with Lady Knowell, the "affected learned woman,"[1] and her family. The lady herself is

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[1]Her pretended "learnedness" and her misuse of words may be anticipatory of Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's The Rivals (1775).

attracted to Leander, who, in turn, loves and is loved by Lucretia, her daughter. Lodwick, her son, and Isabella are in love, but Sir Patient, prompted by his clever wife, promises Isabella to Fainlove. Sir Credulous Easy, according to an agreement with Lady Knowell, arrives to marry Lucretia. Lodwick is resolved that his sister shall not marry the repulsive old fop and submits him to befuddling trickery. Having him feign dumbness before Lucretia, Lodwick robs him of his watch, diamonds, and money. They, for Leander assists in the cheat, persuade him to give a noisy serenade under his mistress' window. The deafening fanfare awakens Sir Patient, who sends out his servants and clerks who severely beat Sir Credulous. Lodwick discovers Sir Credulous courting Lucretia, who by this time loathes him, and frightens him with word of a jealous rival able to poison an adversary at a distance by means of a subtle venom. Sir Credulous hides in a basket and requests Lodwick to have him transported to Essex. Lodwick addresses the basket to Leander's lodgings. When he is discovered at Sir Patient's, Sir Credulous is forced to pose as a specialist at the medical consultation, after which he escapes and leaves Lucretia to Leander when Lady Knowell gives him up.

Most of the intrigue of the comedy arises from Lady Fancy's attempt to prevent Sir Patient's discovery of her amour. Both Lodwick and Isabella become involved. The same night, Lady Fancy has an assignation with Wittmore and Isabella has agreed to admit Lodwick to her chamber on condition that he conduct himself with propriety. In the dark Mundy, Lady Fancy's woman, mistakes Lodwick for Wittmore and leads him to her

mistress' chamber. Lodwick, supposing her to be Isabella, is surprised at Lady Fancy's behavior; but when he discovers the error does not have the grace to resist the temptation. In the meantime, Wittmore, meeting Isabella in the garden and mistaking her for Lady Fancy, speaks to her with such familiarity that she runs away from him. In her haste she runs into Lady Fancy's room instead of her own, just as Sir Patient, awakened by Sir Credulous' noisy serenade, stumbles in half asleep to discover the whole scene. Isabella is angry to find Lodwick in another lady's chamber; Lady Fancy is astonished to learn that her gallant is not Wittmore. She excuses herself by exposing Isabella's affair with Lodwick, who is too astonished to explain. The next morning to avert further suspicion from herself, Lady Fancy writes a love letter (to Wittmore) expressing her disappointment that he did not appear the night before to fulfill her expectations of enjoyment. She gives the letter to Sir Patient with Isabella's name signed. Sir Patient is angry with his daughter, and when Wittmore arrives, upbraids him for his part in such forward conduct before the wedding. As Wittmore reads the letter, he recognizes Lady Fancy's handwriting; between them, in lively asides, they arrange another meeting.

The next time Sir Patient catches Lady Fancy she does not find it so easy to get rid of her lover. A series of amusing incidents build up interest and suspense. When Sir Patient enters the room, Wittmore hides behind the bed, leaving his hat and sword on the table. Sir Patient Fancy sees them; his lady explains that they have been left by Fainlove for Mundy, who

will put new ribbon on them for the wedding. Sir Patient lies down on the bed. Wittmore sneaks forward to make his way out and stumbles over a chair. Sir Patient throws open the curtain; Wittmore gets under the bed. In his attempt to escape from there, he pulls down the things on the dressing table. Sir Patient leaps up; Lady Fancy sits on Wittmore's back as he lies on his hands and knees and covers him with her gown while she pretends to faint. Sir Patient comes to her assistance; she takes him around the neck hiding his face as she raises herself up. Wittmore escapes.

The development of the plot is in accord with a conventional pattern. The play opens with a conversation between Isabella and Lucretia in which they reveal the general situations. Act I and the first scene of Act II introduce all the characters, and the Wittmore-Fainlove deception is created. Fanny, the seven-year-old daughter of Sir Patient, wise and bawdy beyond her years, is brought in as one of the "mixers" in the intrigue. She overhears the amorous plots of her elders and reveals some of them to her father, who upbraids her with questions about what she has heard and seen.[1] The remainder of Act II, Acts III and IV carry on the action, which is lively and amusing with tricks, surprises, disguise, scenes in the darkness, mistakes, and other devices of intrigue. Into the intrigue of the comedy, Mrs. Behn strikes a note of seriousness in her opposition to forced

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[1]Wilcox finds in Fanny Moliere's innocent Louison "corrupted to fit Restoration taste." Op. cit., p.148.

marriage, which she pictures as ridiculous in the case of Sir Patient and Lucia, his young wife.

Sir Patient Fancy is a comedy which deserved the favorable reception accorded it in its day. With its light, witty, amusing dialogue transposed into seasonable phraseology, and with its comic elements, devices, and situations stripped of Restoration indecencies, the play would, I think, be good comedy in any age. As is true of most of her comedies, Sir Patient Fancy demonstrates Mrs. Behn's ability to gather conventional elements together into an intricate and amusing plot, her cleverness in adapting material gathered from various sources to a comedy suitable for the Restoration stage, and her creativeness in portraying original comic characters.

The Lucky Chance

The Lucky Chance; or, The Alderman's Bargain, which was originally presented at the Theater Royal, Drury Lane in April, 1686, proved to be, quite deservedly, one of Mrs. Behn's most popular plays. Following the original production, it "kept the stage a decade or more"[1] and was revived at Lincoln's Inn Fields in the summer of 1718.[2] The plot, which is Mrs. Behn's own invention (except in the design Lady Fulbank employs in her pursuit of Gayman), was used in part, without due credit to the source, by Mrs. Hannah Cowley, an eighteenth century dramatist, in a comedy entitled A School for Graybeards; or, The Mourning Bride (1786). The play was witnessed by John Genest and Horace Walpole, both of whom recognized Mrs. Behn's material stripped, though it was, of the Restoration indecencies and, in comparison, found the eighteenth century version chaste and quite decent.

In its own day, Mrs. Behn was obliged to defend her comedy against a charge of excessive "indecencies." In her vindictive

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[1] Summers, Works, III, p.180.

[2] Ibid., and Genest, op. cit., I, p.456.

Preface, the author asserts (as she did on several occasions) that the criticism was unjust -- because the play was written by a woman. She defends the actions which were proclaimed improper upon the grounds that on the stage nothing is unnatural nor obscene when "'tis proper for the characters." She cites other plays, written by men, which are not condemned, and begs for herself the same freedom allowed masculine poets. The comedy, however, gained favor in spite of, or perhaps with the aid of, the malice of Mrs. Behn's critics, who were too concerned with the "indecencies" found in the details to note the tone of moral seriousness which is woven into the whole scheme of the plot.

The custom of forced marriage which Mrs. Behn censures in a number of her plays provides the serious element in The Lucky Chance. To emphasize her distaste for the custom, Mrs. Behn presents three groups of characters who are its victims. Sir Feeble Fainwou'd, an old alderman, is married to the young and beautiful Leticia, who loves and is loved by Bellmour, a young gallant. Sir Cautious Fulbank, an old banker, is married to the honest and generous Julia, who loves and is loved by Gayman, a spark of the town. Diana has been contracted by her father, Sir Feeble Fainwou'd, to Bearjest, the foppish nephew of Sir Cautious Fulbank; she is in love with Leticia's brother, Bredwell, who is Sir Cautious' prentice. Bellmour, the virtuous hero, resorts to trickery to prevent Leticia's having to lie with the unscrupulous Sir Feeble; Gayman, having courted Julia ardently, is determined to cuckold Sir Cautious; Bredwell lets Bearjest steal Diana from her father's house while in turn he

steals her from Bearjest's carriage and marries her. In each case the lovers find a way to avoid the bonds of the forced marriage.

Bellmour returns from the continent, whence he has been exiled for transgressing the duelling act, to find Leticia just married to Sir Feeble. To gain access to Leticia he passes himself off as Sir Feeble's nephew, Francis Fainwou'd. When he is presented to Leticia, she is struck by his likeness to Bellmour, who has been reported dead. At the first opportunity Bellmour reveals himself to Leticia, and they plan to evade the old husband. On the wedding night Sir Feeble confesses to his "nephew" that his cleverness has got him a beautiful young wife; having falsely reported to Leticia that Bellmour had been hanged "at the Hague in Holland," he intercepted the pardon which had been granted by the King to secure himself against his young rival's return. With the pardon in his hand (Sir Feeble has turned it over to his "nephew" for safe keeping), Bellmour determines to rescue Leticia. Just as Sir Feeble is ready to retire with his bride, Bellmour enters with a false summons from Sir Cautious. Reluctantly Sir Feeble dresses and leaves the house. Bellmour and Leticia attempt to escape and are almost caught by Sir Feeble on his return. The next night, having learned that Sir Feeble was greatly frightened the night before by Bellmour's ghost -- Gayman escaping from Julia's apartment covered with a sheet -- Bellmour appears as his own bloody ghost just as Sir Feeble is retiring and with threats of eternal hauntings if he dare lie with Leticia frightens the old man so that he is more than glad to resign his young wife to her deserving lover.

Lady Fulbank is more skillful and subtle in the deception of her old husband. She cries bitterly against forced marriage:

> Oh how fatal are forc'd Marriages!
> How many Ruins one such Match pulls on!
> Had I but kept my Sacred vows to Gayman,
> How happy had I been -- how prosperous he!
> Whilst now I languish in a loath'd Embrace,
> Pine out my Life with Age -- Consumptions, Coughs...

Her protest emphasizes the Bellmour-Leticia plot, the main action of the play. Learning from her servant that Gayman, instead of being with his uncle in the country, is lodging, penniless, under the name Wasteall, at Gammer Grime's in Alsatia, Lady Fulbank sends Bredwell, dressed as the devil, with a bag of gold.[1] Gayman must pay for the gold. That night he has an appointment with the devil and is led blindfolded to Lady Fulbank's house, where he is met by Pert (the maid) dressed as an old hag. She leads him, still blindfolded, to Julia. Not knowing Julia, he supposes that he has lain with some ugly old woman who has sent him the gold. It is not, however, Julia's unfaithfulness and trickery that drives Sir Cautious from his bed, but his own avarice. Gayman, as Wasteall, wins £ 300 from Sir Cautious at dice. They throw for the whole sum. If Gayman wins, he is to spend the night with Lady Fulbank; if Sir Cautious wins, the debt is cancelled. To add interest to the intrigue Mrs. Behn lets the dice fall in Gayman's favor and gives him his "lucky chance." The Alderman keeps his

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[1]The whole plan of Lady Fulbank's pursuit of Gayman is taken from Shirley's Lady of Pleasure. Dryden uses the same idea for delivering gold to a lover in both The Wild Gallant and An Evening's Love.

bargain. When Julia discovers the trick, she pretends to be angry with her husband and vows to "separate from his bed." At that point Bellmour and Leticia seek refuge from Sir Feeble at Lady Fulbank's apartment. Sir Feeble arrives on their heels. The two old men decide that their young wives are not for them and are willing to relinquish the vivacious ladies to the young gallants.

Bredwell, Gayman, Pert, and Bearjest are agents in carrying out Diana's revolt against the marriage planned for her by her father. Thinking that he is saving her from marrying some other "Fop, Fool, beaten Ass -- Blockhead," Bearjest meets Diana "in a coach and six when 'tis dark, at the back Gate." Departing Diana utters a farewell to her father:

> Father, farewell -- if you dislike my course,
> Blame the old rigid Customs of your force.

While Gayman and the devils whom he has promised to show to Bearjest are entertaining Bearjest in the garden, Bredwell carries Diana away and marries her. When Bearjest gets away from the devils and arrives, sorely beaten, at his quarters, Pert, disguised as Diana, is waiting for him with a parson. When the hoax is discovered, Bearjest accepts his bargain without much complaint, for he had formerly been contracted to Pert.

Mrs. Behn has employed a number of interesting devices which add amusement to the play. Sir Feeble is frightened almost out of his wits by the two "false" ghosts that visit him and proclaim themselves the wronged Bellmour. The "devil" scenes offer opportunity for the use of songs, dances, and masques. Act IV, iii, is made effective with the lyrics, nymph and shepherd

dances, and a song in dialogue which prepares Gayman for the visit to his benefactor. Another greatly modified devil scene is the one in which Gayman shows Bearjest the devils.

Bellmour's stratagem for getting Sir Feeble out of the house on his wedding night leads into a delightful scene between the two old men. Sir Feeble arrives at Sir Cautious' house thinking he has been sent for; Sir Cautious cannot understand why the bridegroom is not with his bride. The two stare at each other and say nothing sensible until Sir Cautious realizes the humor of the situation and demands an explanation. The ghosts, Gayman and Bredwell, appear followed by Lady Fulbank, who sends both old men back to their beds.

Both Bellmour and Gayman are given double roles. Bellmour represents himself as Sir Feeble's nephew, while Gayman, in his poverty stricken state, becomes Wasteall, a disreputable rogue who begs from his gullible old landlady, Gammer Grime. Bellmour, in his assumed role, is able to rescue Leticia from her old husband; Gayman, as Wasteall, gambles with Sir Cautious for Julia, and wins.

Mrs. Behn has succeeded in drawing her characters rather effectively. Sir Feeble is obnoxious as an old man in love, nauseous, foolish, and full of silly affected prattle; Bearjest is a conceited, objectionable fop; Sir Cautious, an avaricious old husband, willing to be cuckold to save £ 300. Bellmour and Leticia are the virtuous hero and heroine; Lady Fulbank is the witty vivacious heroine well matched with the sparkish Gayman; Diana is the love-lorn miss determined to follow the dictates of love in order to avoid a forced marriage, the wickedness of

which she sees in the union of her father and Leticia.

Although the entire play is full of evidence of Mrs. Behn's wit and humor, of her ability to handle situations and characters so that neither intrigue, bustle, nor confusion can drag them out of hand, the serious tone is preserved throughout and is presented with just the right amount of emphasis in the closing words by Sir Cautious:

> I find, Sir Feeble, we were a couple of old Fools indeed, to think at our Age to cozen two lusty young Fellows of their Mistresses; 'tis no wonder that both the Men and the Women have been too hard for us; we are not fit Matches for either, that's the truth on't.
>
> The Warrior needs must his Rival yield,
> Who comes with blunted Weapons to the field.[1]

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[1] Act V, vii.

The Amorous Jilt

Mrs. Behn's "Orphan Play," The Younger Brother; or, The Amorous Jilt was adopted by Charles Gildon, rewritten in part, and presented at Drury Lane Theater in December, 1696, seven years after the author's death. In spite of the Prologue's plea, "be kind to a poor Orphan-Play," the production met with "brutal treatment" which, Gildon asserts in "The Epistle Dedicatory," came from

> ... some Faction that was made against it which indeed was very Evident on the First day, and more on the endeavours employed, to render the Profits of the Third, as small as could be.[1]

He contends also that there was little reason for such treatment either in the acting which was good, despite "Mr. Vanbruggen's reading of some of his part," or in his own (Gildon's) alteration in the first act "in removing that old bustle about Whig and Tory." However, he continues, there may have been some irrational objection about the plot which is rather full of intrigue in parts and whose continuity may have been interrupted by the cutting out of part of the action to bring the length of the play

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[1] Op. cit., p.10.

within the time limit. Langbaine opines that the failure came from "the tedious Scenes in Blank Verse, betwixt Mirtilla and Prince Frederick" which would have been more diverting "given in another more lasie Dress." Whatever the reason for its failure on the Restoration stage, The Younger Brother was received with sufficient disfavor to bar it from any further appearance then or later.

The material of the play is, for the most part, Mrs. Behn's own. The date of composition is very uncertain although the Whig and Tory business, which was removed from the first act by Gildon, is evidence that at least that part must have been written between 1681 and 1683, the years during which the stage was crowded with political plays. (The remaining acts may have been written during any of the remaining years of the author's life.) Gildon replaced the political material with a riotous "Rake-hell" scene between Sir Merlin Marteen and Sir Morgan Blunder, the foppish rakes of the play. He also inserted two songs of his own composition, one to open Act II, ii, the other to introduce the second scene of Act V; both are typical of the lyrics found in most of the Restoration comedies, neither has any particular merit.

Langbaine says that the plot is "taken from a true story of the Brother of Col. Henry Martin, and a Lady that must be nameless. See the Novel call'd Hatige."[1] Summers found the

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[1] Op. cit., p.10.

novel Hittage; or, the Amours of the King of Tamaran by Gabriel de Bremond, a bitter satire on Charles II and Lady Castlemaine, to have little in common with Mrs. Behn's play beyond the likeness of the characters of Hattige and Mirtella.[1] In the main the plot of the comedy is made up of lovers' intrigues and pursuits, but there is a serious note, which Nicoll finds "in places almost bitter,"[2] against the English custom of primogeniture inheritance.

Most of the intrigue concerns Mirtilla, the "amorous jilt," to whom George, the "younger brother" had once been attached. While George was traveling on the continent, Mirtilla, for convenience, married the rake-hellish Sir Morgan Blunder. Prince Frederick, George's friend, having fallen in love with Mirtilla in Ghent, where she was attending the religious ceremonies accompanying her sister's acceptance of the veil, follows her to London and begs George's assistance in locating her. When Sir Morgan, after accidently encountering the Prince, brings him to meet Mirtilla, Frederick feigns a peculiar illness and falls into her arms in order to arrange an interview. Mirtilla has fallen in love with her page (George's sister Olivia in disguise) and makes advances to him; although she receives Frederick and attempts, at the same time, to placate George. George, however, has learned of Mirtilla's wickedness from Olivia and makes every effort to show the Prince that she is a

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[1] Works, IV, p.314.

[2] Op. cit., p.257.

jilt. Mirtilla is so clever that even when she is caught leading Olivia to the bed, she outwits him by revealing Olivia's sex and then confessing all her vices. She throws herself upon Frederick's generosity so ingeniously that even George finds her admirable.

Olivia, in the meantime, has become involved in an amourous intrigue of her own. Her father has contracted her to Welborn, one of George's friends. They meet in the Mall and without knowing each other fall in love. While attending Mirtilla at Prince Frederick's lodgings, which are also Welborn's, Olivia, as the page, finds herself obliged to accept an offer from Welborn to share his bed. Fearing to disclose her secret by a refusal of the offer, she sleeps with him, but slips away before daybreak leaving a note which explains her identity.[1] Welborn's disappointment is quite comical. George, happy that they love each other, brings them together for the joyous union.

George too becomes involved through a double role. To Mirtilla and Frederick he is Lejère, a gay young spark; to his father he is the "younger brother," a sober young prentice, obedient and dutiful. Sir Rowland has designed for him the usual fate of the younger son, marriage with a wealthy old widow. Lady Youthly, an ancient, toothless, palsied and blind beldame is to be his fortune, while Sir Rowland has planned for himself Teresia, the beautiful young granddaughter. At their first meeting George and Teresia fall in love, and ultimately marry

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[1] A similar scene is used in D'Urfey's The Royalist. Genest finds Mrs. Behn's management the better. Op. cit., I, p.78.

despite father, grandmother, and Sir Merlin, who is also pursuing Teresia.

The lovers' intrigues are executed in Mrs. Behn's usual, clever style. She uses a number of the conventional devices. Olivia is disguised as a page throughout; Teresia dons male attire and together they go in search of prospective lovers before they must settle down with the husbands designed for them. Teresia sees George, and Olivia recognizes Welborn as the "handsome Fellow that entertain'd us with so much Wit, on Thursday last in the Mall." That evening at a masquerade ball they press their suits, Teresia as a witty vivacious young lady, Olivia as a messenger from the lady of the Mall to Welborn. Prince Frederick and Welborn appear at the ball in identical costumes and cause both Olivia and George some confusion. The double role which George plays complicates matters for him. It is, however, the variety of the incidents which follow in quick succession that makes the intrigue interesting.

The characters, though not unusual, are well drawn. Sir Rowland is the typical parent, uncommon in his harshness toward his older son and his kindness toward George and Olivia, the younger son and daughter. George and Welborn are sparkling young gallants full of wit and vigor, well matched with the clever, vivacious young ladies, Teresia and Olivia. Mirtilla, appropriately called the "amorous jilt," ignores her foppish husband and jilts prince for page. Frederick is the lovelorn hero, who wins Mirtilla in the end. Sir Merlin Marteen and Mirtilla's husband, Sir Morgan Blunder, are whoring, drinking, besotted "rake-hells" who attain their "just dues." Sir Morgan loses his wife;

Sir Merlin loses his fortune and Teresia and marries Diana, the cast-off mistress of a gambler.

The development of the plot is in accord with the traditional design. Mrs. Behn uses the first two acts to introduce characters and situations and put things in order for the intrigues which become more and more complicated and involved as the action progresses through the third, fourth, and part of the fifth acts. The last scenes are concerned with the explanations, discoveries, confessions, and matching of the lovers -- and the traditional comic ending. George happily married to Teresia escapes Lady Youthly and the younger brother's usual fate.

Mrs. Behn's last play did not bring her the fame that it might have. Although Gildon claims:

> the Play itself had an Intrinsic Merit; for we find it full of Humour, Wit, and Variety; the Conversation Gay and Genteel, the Love Soft and Pathetic, the incidents Natural, and Easy, and the Conduct of the Plot very Justifiable,

<u>The Younger Brother; or, The Amorous Jilt</u> remains an "Orphan-Play" adopted neither in its own day nor afterwards.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters I have tried to describe the comedies of Mrs. Behn as representative plays of the period, and to make tentative critical estimates of them against the contemporary drama. Although Mrs. Behn was for almost two decades one of the chief contributors of plays to the Duke's Company, until recent years she has been taken into little account by literary critics. Because those who have noticed her at all have done so disparagingly, they have brought upon her such a reputation for indecency and immorality that her plays have been read without prejudice by few students of the period. Pope has been partly responsible for the scandalous opinion of Aphra Behn with his condemning couplet:

> The stage how loosely does Astraea tread
> Who fairly puts all characters to bed.

Though she may have trod the stage with no more looseness than many of her male contemporaries, as the only professional woman playwright of the age, she has been subjected to much more severe and unrelenting criticism than Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, or others who wrote in the same vein. That Mrs. Behn herself was aware of the injustice to which she was subjected on this score, even in her own day by a small group of theater-goers, we are

assured by the several pieces she wrote in her own vindication. From these and scattered words and phrases, we get the feeling that she was always more or less on the defensive in her position as a woman writer in the world of men.

I have not found it necessary to defend Mrs. Behn against the criticism which has classed her as one of the most immoral and licentious of the Restoration dramatists, for she has written her own best defense in the preface to The Lucky Chance, wherein she expresses her theory of language and action in plays:

> ... I see nothing unnatural nor obscene: 'tis proper for the Characters. ... If I should repeat the Words exprest in these Scenes I mention, I might justly be charg'd with coarse ill Manners, and very little Modesty, and yet they so naturally fall into the places they are designed for, and are so proper for the Business, that there is not the least fault to be found with them.

The comedies of Mrs. Behn are in accord with her expressed theory in "An Epistle to the Reader," attached to The Dutch Lover:

> As I take it Comedie was never meant, either for a converting or a conforming Ordinance: In short, I think a play the best divertisement that wise men have: but I do also think them nothing so who discourse as formallie about the rules of it, as if 'twere the grand affair of human life.

In her modest ambition to entertain Mrs. Behn was successful, for most of her comedies are amusing. Stripped of Restoration language and the indecencies of her day, they would prove to be good comedy on any stage.

In the writing of her plays she used devices, which were traditional in the comedies of the period as well as in the comedies of an earlier age: various forms of disguise,

tricks, surprise, street fights, duels, confusion in darkness, mistaken identities, love entanglements, and others. She early settled upon a formula: two pairs of lovers, one the love-lorn hero and heroine, the other a vivacious gallant and a witty lady, with generally a third couple of servants; a principal action concerned with some variant of over-reaching a strict parent or guardian by the love-lorn pair; subplots dealing with the difficulties of the other lovers, complications and confusion resulting from the acts of a "mixer" in the person of a servant or someone similarly related to one of the main characters. Her command of structure and her stagecraft ability enabled her to write a fast-moving play which must have kept the attention of the audience.

Mrs. Behn's plays the student today may find interesting because they represent, in some respects, a cross section of the drama of the Restoration. Because she was "forced to write for bread and not ashamed to own it" and was, therefore, eager to please the audience, Mrs. Behn followed the tastes of the theater-goers and wrote the kind of play that was momentarily popular. As a result we cannot say of her that she was responsible for the development of any one type of drama, although she excelled in the comedy of intrigue, which she wrote long after its general popularity had waned.. In the tragic vein she wrote one tragedy and three tracigomedies, but true comedy was her forte.

Mrs. Behn, it is clear, is not entitled to a position beside the best and foremost dramatists. Though she was not

as good as the best, she was certainly not as bad as the worst and should, therefore, be given just credit for the work that she did as a professional woman playwright in a man's world. An extremely daring and ingenious woman, she was, in her career as a writer, typical of her day but never above it, and "the evil that she did lived after her."[1]

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[1] Rosamon Gilder, "Aphra Behn," Theater Arts Monthly, XII (1928), p.409.

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